AUGUST 2019

SOUTH AFRICA

PLAYBOY

THE INTERVIEW

ACTIVIST TARANA BURKE AND THE FUTURE OF THE ME TOO MOVEMENT

REBEL EROTICA

ARTIST HELEN BEARD DELIVERS HER GRAPHIC PLAYBOY EXCLUSIVE

INSIDE THE SPORT

WE GET CANDID WITH MX SENSATION ANTHONY RAYNARD

+ SIN CITY

COME PARTY WITH THE BUNNY IN GLAMOROUS LAS VEGAS

INTO THE DEEP END

DIVE INTO THE WET WORLD OF CREATIVE ARTIST ED FREEMAN

Nikita Rokita

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DREAM HAMPTON

Shortly after signing on for the Playboy Interview with Tarana Burke, and following the premiere of her Lifetime docuseries Surviving R. Kelly, this powerhouse writer and producer was named one of 2019's Time 100. Burke herself wrote the accompanying tribute, describing hampton as "the kind of storyteller who could change things." Indeed, even as Surviving reshapes the #MeToo conversation, hampton continues to put out vital work, including the BET series Finding Justice and the HBO documentary It's a Hard Truth, Ain't It.



ALEX THOMAS

For The Long Road to President Pete, we sent our Washington correspondent out on the campaign trail with South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, the fresh-faced contender who could take down Trump — and, if elected, become the country's first openly gay president. "America is ready for somebody who doesn't fit the profile of a typical president," Thomas says. "Mayor Pete has been able to capitalize on that."

WILL VARNER

Varner's mash-up of KonMari and clitorises on page 47 marks a break from PLAYBOY's historically hetero humor. " I try to tell stories that reflect the complex, diverse, troubling but beautiful world we live in," says the former BuzzFeed design director. "I hope this one makes readers laugh and also increases the spaces where queer people can feel comfortable and see their stories represented." Varner is also an illustrator and an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts.



Luis Gomez

An internationally renown photographer, producer, editor, videographer and musician, whose work is published worldwide. Luis Gomez is known as a guitar player and exclusive artist signed by Gibson guitars and producer and filmmaker. Luis Gomez is the CEO of Universe 137 Studios And Chicas Universe 137 working with more than 40 magazines.





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Photography by Brian B Hayes
No 85 | **August 2019**

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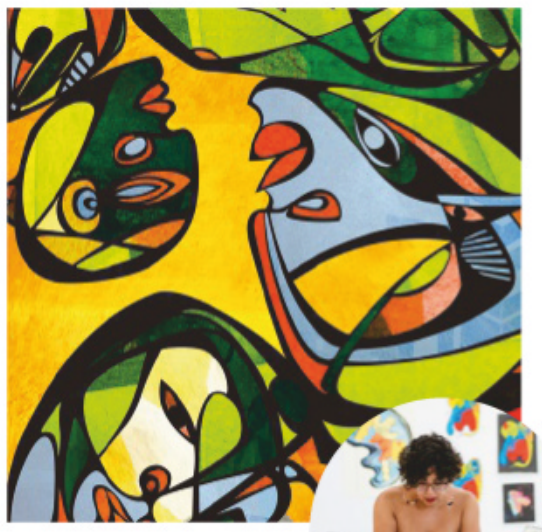
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PRIDE IS GOOD

As a brand built on the conviction that all people — no matter their race, gender or sexual orientation — have an equal right to pleasure, Playboy is fiercely committed to fighting for LGBTQ rights both inside and outside the pages of this magazine. In honor of that commitment, Playboy asked seven artists from the LGBTQ community to reimagine our Bunny ears with artwork that relects what pride means to them. Proceeds from the ears — which will be available at PlayboyShop.com in June, just in time for pride month — will support 50 Bills 50 States, the Trevor Project's initiative to ban conversion therapy in the U.S. Check out this behindthe-scenes look at our call to ears and the artists leading the charge.



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FROM KOREA WITH LOVE

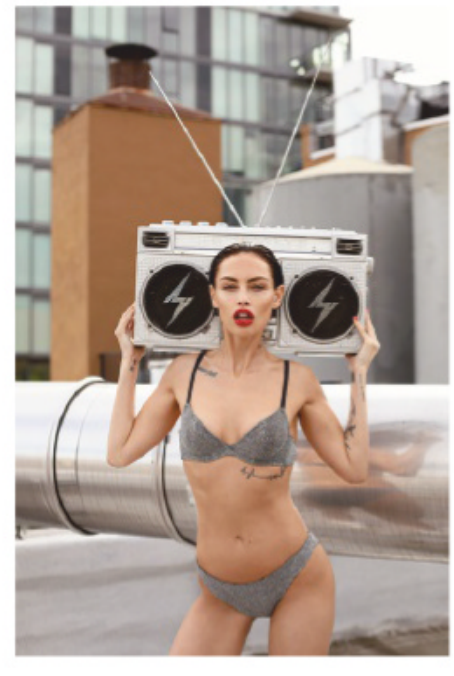
“In 2019, there is no single word to explain a person’s sexuality. Many people are not just male, female, heterosexual, homosexual.” So says our international sister publication Playboy Korea in its recent 20Q with actor Hong Seok-cheon. A superstar in South Korea, Hong is considered the country’s irst openly gay celebrity. “It’s been really hard, but I knew I had to be honest with myself irst if I wanted to love someone else,” says Hong of how his world changed after he came out in 2000. “I don’t regret my decision at all.” Accompanying the actor’s insights is a pictorial that bears a lattering resemblance to the Ezra Miller feature that ran, Bunny ears and all, in our Winter 2019 issue. Together, the two stories stand as a celebration of luidity that Hong and Miller embody from opposite corners of the globe.

ON OUR SHELVES



With a résumé that spans 53 years and 10 roles at Playboy, Pat Lacey (left) has lived and breathed this brand longer than just about anyone. Now, the former Club Bunny, Bunny Mother and Playmate Promotions coordinator shares her fascinating story in the pages of a new memoir. In The Black Bunny Hop, out now, Lacey traces her life’s challenges and triumphs, including her experiences confronting racism as a Bunny at the Sunset Strip Playboy Club during the civil rights era. Lacey sums it all up in the book’s preface: “My life has been happy, sad, funny, heartwarming, sexy and unbelievably satisfying.”

CUCKOO FOR COCO



Ever since it entered British bedrooms in 2001, Coco de Mer has been credited with elevating the U.K.’s perception of lingerie. Based on this photo of July Playmate Teela LaRoux wearing the new Silver Moon bra and brief, we predict the intimates empire’s latest collaboration with Playboy will be no less impactful on domestic audiences. July’s Playboy Collection by Coco de Mer is meant to capture the “sensuality, temptation and revelry of a glamorous night on the town.” coco-de-mer.com/playboy-by-coco-de-mer

MEET ME IN VEGAS



Every bunny in the pool! Playboy Fridays at TAO Beach — our annual residency at the Venetian in Las Vegas — are back for another steamy summer. Every Friday through Labor Day, Playboy will transform the hotel’s 18,000-square-foot day club into a Rabbitriddled oasis complete with Playmates, Bunny servers, themed cabanas and the hottest DJs on the Strip. What’s more, the series will once again include Discover & Be Discovered, our talent search for future Playboy muses. (Speaking of muses, March Playmate Miki Hamano is pictured above, kicking off the season.) For tickets, VIP packages and cabana reservations (ages 21 and over), visit taolasvegas.com/beach/playboyfridays.

Man in His Domain

ED FREEMAN



"I just hold my breath," says the photographer, shot here by Carlos Gonzalez Palmieri. As he did with the photos on these pages, Freeman digitally manipulates his work in post-production to achieve "eerie, uncanny" effects.

HIS HYPE-OBSERVANT ATTENTION TO LIGHT, MOVEMENT AND FORM ENCAPSULATES OUR CURRENT CURIOSITY ABOUT EVERYTHING FLUID. COME DIVE INTO THE WET, WONDROUS WORLD OF THIS ISSUE'S COVER ARTIST

BY **MICHAEL SLENSKE**

The photographer paces nervously around the shallow end of a 10-foot-deep capsule-shape pool. "I can't swim," he admits with a raspy laugh that carries across the backyard of a nondescript (if tastefully remodeled) midcentury ranch house in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena. The revelation is shocking given that he's here to shoot a series of underwater nudes, one of which can be seen on the cover of this magazine. Right away, not all is as it seems. But this is the beauty of the life and work of Ed Freeman.

With his Caesar cut and silvery, speckled beard, it's hard to believe the Worcester, Massachusetts–born artist is 76 years old. His athleisure ensemble of Nikes, track pants and aviators contrasts with that of his longtime aide-de-camp, Carlos Gonzalez Palmieri, who strolls around the yard like an off-duty Rat Packer in a flowery button-down, a trilby and Wayfarers.

"Even though I'm still the boss, I sort of work for him," Freeman says jokingly of Palmieri. "All I do is make art."

Palmieri has indeed played a crucial role in turning Freeman's underwater practice "into a science," which today starts with positioning C-stands around the pool to capture every beam of California light. "This is our big secret," jokes Palmieri, barefoot, as he wraps the grip stands in foam padding. An assistant moves on to sinking polyester sheets into the pool for test shots while Freeman surveys the sparkling water with trepidation.

"We've tried 50 different ways of diffusing light, including a giant flag," Freeman says. "It's a square frame with a diffuser in it, but you really don't want a heavy 12-foot device hanging over models."

The pool area's blue accent tiles also provide a tricky reflection, but Freeman knows to cover them with dresser-drawer liners. "It's all very low-tech," he says.

His equipment, not so much. Freeman shoots with a Nikon D850 (about $3,000) nestled inside an AquaTech water housing (another $1,600). With this apparatus and a 20-pound vest to offset his body's natural buoyancy, he submerges to snap as many as 18 models in underwater balletic poses. This explains the need for a shallow backyard pool versus an Olympicsize one. "Sometimes I can't get up," he says, "and I've had to have my models rescue me." Most of the time, it's Palmieri who yanks him to the surface.

Freeman moved his operation to this suburban locale in the summer of 2009. A longtime friend, a former California Institute of Technology professor who resigned because it wasn't intellectually stimulating enough, gave Freeman carte blanche to use the *petite piscine*. Although he lives 20 minutes away, in Chinatown, the Pasadena ranch has effectively served as his studio ever since.

"I'm just really used to this," he says. "I have this real sense that some power beyond my grasp is running these things. I never intended for any of this to happen."

• • •

Freeman has spent roughly the past 12 years adding lyrical gravitas to the mythos of the southern California pool, which itself has been a recurring trope in postmodern art since David Hockney and Slim Aarons pushed it into the zeitgeist in the latter half of the 20th century. But producing otherworldly art in a modest backyard, featuring dancers — mostly female — whose poses could have been plucked from a Tintoretto or Rubens masterpiece, is the last thing anyone would have expected from the younger son of two Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors. His father taught statistical analysis and probability theory; his mother taught Russian and designed MIT's first language lab.

"Everyone in the family went to either Harvard or MIT, except me," says Freeman, noting that his older brother is now one of the world's preeminent rare book dealers and scholars. "I was the black sheep."

After living up to some expectations — Freeman played multiple instruments as a child and snapped photos for the local newspaper while studying at Ohio's Oberlin College — he abruptly stuffed what he could into a backpack and hitchhiked to Mexico the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It served as a finale of sorts in a series of micro-dramas. He didn't want to follow in his parents' academic footsteps. He was also gay and painfully in love with his best friend. "College just made no sense" after Kennedy's death, he says. "I walked out of class, and that was the last one I was ever in."

What came next was a "Jack Kerouac kind of trip — all this crazy shit happened." At the tail end of this drug-and-booze-fueled odyssey, a friend sent Freeman back to Massachusetts to sober up and reestablish himself. He began teaching folk guitar and eventually became a roadie for the Remains, who opened for the Beatles on their last U.S. tour. This in turn led to a stint as folksinger Phil Ochs's road manager. "I got the job because people thought, Oh, he knows what he's doing. I didn't," Freeman says.

He then began writing song lyrics. On the basis of one tune, his

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ED FREEMAN**





Above: Artist and subjects at Freeman's PLAYBOY cover shoot in April 2019. "I'm doing stuff that's increasingly abstract," he says. **Left:** Freeman shoots Palmieri; Palmieri shoots back.

new band, the Joyful Noise, signed with Capitol Records and was flown to Los Angeles to live in a house (with naked groupies waiting poolside) at the top of Laurel Canyon, the enclave that was once home to Jim Morrison.

"We recorded two songs and broke up," recalls Freeman. "I was broke, and the producer mentioned he needed an arranger. I barely knew how to read and write music, but he handed me a tape and said, 'I need a string quartet and two Bach trumpets tomorrow.' " He proceeded to teach himself how to arrange that night, and he recorded the next day.

Following the Summer of Love, Freeman moved to New York and arranged hits for Carly Simon and Cher. When he was diagnosed with Reiter's syndrome, a debilitating form of arthritis, his music career was put on pause. He discovered medicinal relief in 1978 after relying on crutches for a year, and moved back to Los Angeles to teach composer Dominic Frontiere how to program synthesizers. While the money was good enough that he was able to buy a home of his own in Laurel Canyon, Freeman soon realized he was no longer interested in music.

He traded the house for a downtown loft and started taking head shots for pocket change. He honed his artistic sense by shooting conceptual nudes abstracted by bent plastic mirrors. He exhibited the semi-surrealist images in a neighborhood café, and he hasn't stopped since.

Along with years of shooting in his studio — including many images of digitally enhanced angels, cowboys and lovers, some of which are featured in his 2000 monograph Work — Freeman took a number of road trips with groups of models to the Salton Sea. There, Freeman remembers "moving farther and farther away until I was so far you couldn't even see the model. So I thought, Fuck it, I'll just shoot landscapes."

He eventually transitioned from nude photography to revitalizing abandoned buildings and road signs across the southern California desertscape, including the Sundowner Motel marquee near Salton City and La Fiesta Ballroom in Bakersfield. That resulted in his *Desert Realty* series and a book of the same name.

In 2007, on the heels of his spin-off *Urban Realty* series — think surreal images of a Walmart in Palm Springs and a Panda Express in Albuquerque — Freeman was sitting at a Starbucks when another, greater truth sat beside him. He chatted up an attractive male dancer who, he learned over his latte, was a former college swim team captain and had a pool at his home in Los Angeles's South Bay.

"When the universe speaks that loudly, you'd be a fool not to pay attention," he says. The pool was blanketed in filth blown in from the nearby train tracks, but Freeman nonetheless bought a waterproof camera bag for $35 and dove in. Those early underwater images inspired the dancer's friends, some of whom were also dancers, to pose for Freeman too.

"It kept growing to the point where two dozen models were just hanging out. And that's really how this all started," he says.

• • •

The day after we meet, Freeman makes his way back to the pool, outfitted in his makeshift technical gear. His goal over the next eight hours is to prove that the subversion of the male gaze (with help from a submarine lens and some post-production digital manipulation) is a fitting conceit in 2019's woke-as-fuck environment.

"I think there's an advantage to my being gay in that I don't want my female nudes to be sex objects," he tells me. "I want them to be about grace and movement."

He welcomes seven models — five women and two men — to the pool area. The models move and behave as though they inhabit this slice of suburbia full-time, and as though a crew of strangers aren't watching them. One scarlet-maned woman repeatedly and patiently glides and jumps into the pool at Freeman's direction. She stops swimming only to listen for the next instruction, unfazed by a topless peer practicing sun salutations on the other side of the yard.

Thirty minutes later, Palmieri nods to one of the male models. He disrobes and stands beside the water, calmly baring his phallus and waiting for his turn to dive in. Although Freeman has convinced the men to be part of this PLAYBOY cover shoot, he offers them no guarantee they'll make the final cut. "But," he tells me, "if I have anything to say about it, they will."

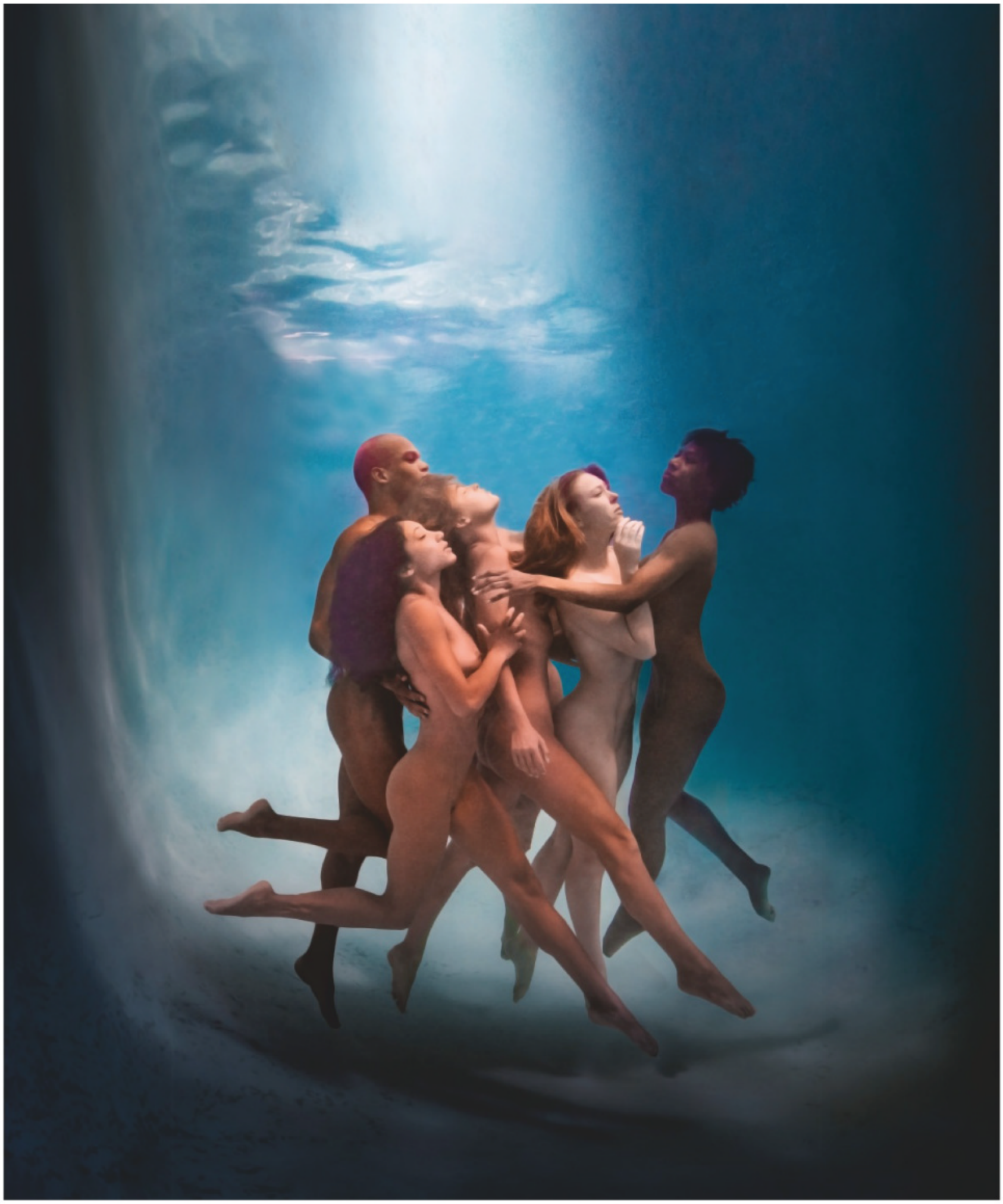
Toward the end of the day, all seven models are told to submerge themselves and cradle one another. "I want to express freedom within this notion of gender identity in the culture, which is very much about an upward and outward movement," explains Freeman. "So this is not going to be pictures with people diving downward."

Freeman instructs them to point and arch their collective extremities. Simultaneously, they all look up at the fading sunlight. The shutter clicks.

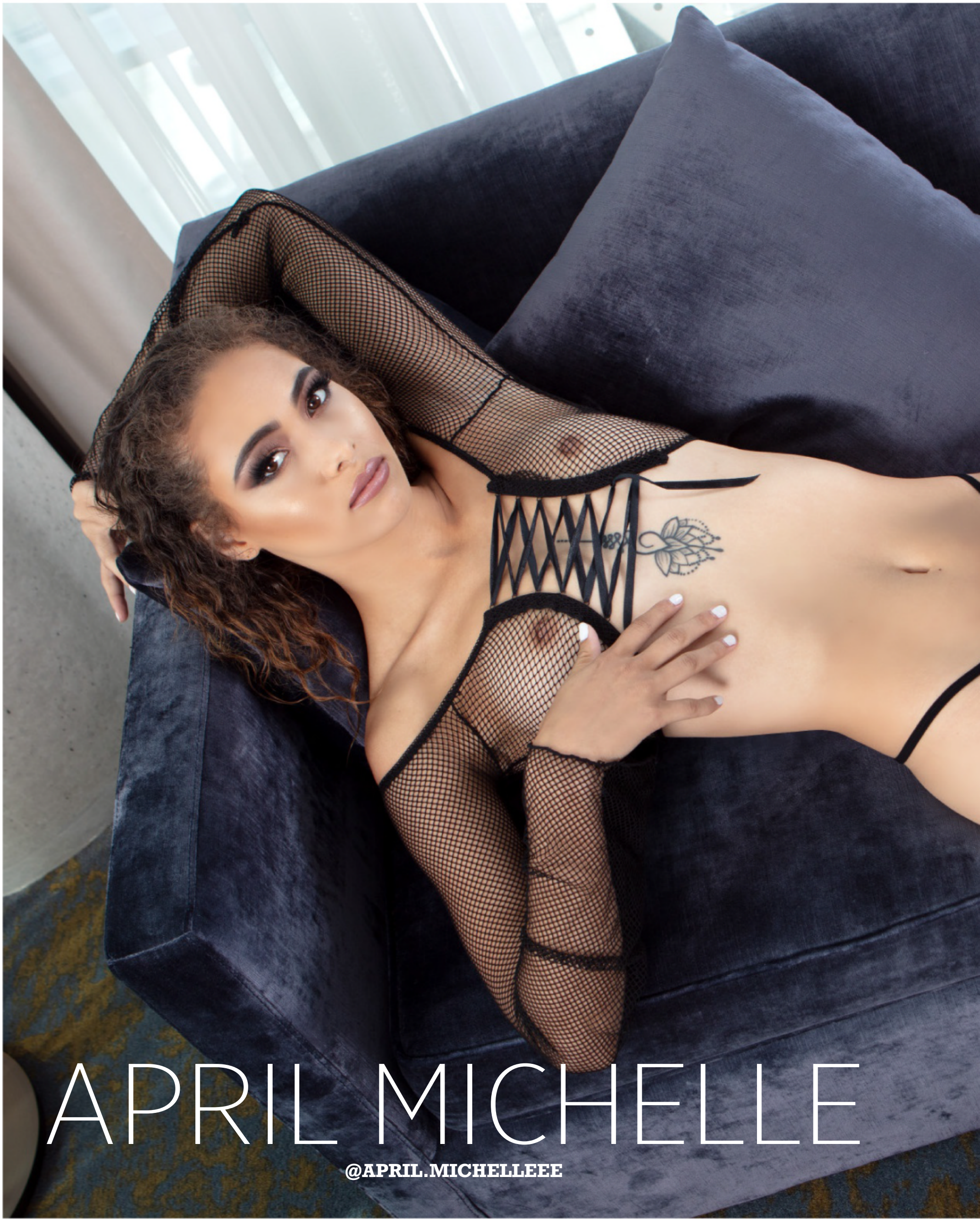
"A lot of people tell me, 'This reminds me of Renaissance paintings,' " he says. "That's probably because those paintings were of gorgeous bodies. They weren't sexually interacting; it was just about the beauty of the human form — and that's really what I'm about."

"I WANT TO EXPRESS FREEDOM WITHIN THIS NOTION OF GENDER."









APRIL MICHELLE

@APRIL.MICHELLEEE

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO @BRUCECOLERO**
MUA **KYLE MCKELLAR** *Shoot Assistant* **DANIELLE HAWKINS**













Describe yourself in 3 words.
Passionate Hardcore Princess.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I've dreamt of shooting with playboy forever, so was super excited.

What was it like starting out as a model?
Starting out as a model wasn't hard just a lot of winging it & having that faith in your inner creativeness to keep going.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
My biggest challenge as a model so far is getting over the nervous sweats when meeting New & important People lol.

Describe your perfect day off.
My perfect day off as a model is playing dress up & taking my pups out.

Do you feel like a city person or a country person?
I'm literally MIXED Lol during the day I'd say I'm country, but by night I'm super glammed up & ready For the night.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I've not thought about where, but I'd like to live somewhere open & quiet with beautiful nature sights.

Do you have a secret talent?
My secret talent ss designing... Clothes, Homes , Furniture Etc....

What's a guilty pleasure?
A guilty pleasure of mine is definitely teasing.

Which song is absolutely certain to make your cry?
A song that Is certain to make me cry is skyscraper By Demi Lovato.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
"Fuck" It could mean let's get it on or Aww Shucks.







PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: TARANA BURKE

A candid conversation with the activist who launched Me Too — more than a decade prior to Weinsteingate — on backlash, boundaries and the future of the movement

Before Me Too was a hashtag, before social media gave everyday people the power to have public conversations about sexual harassment, assault and rape — and before the inevitable and ongoing backlash — Tarana Burke was working with young girls, most of them black, encouraging them to share their most traumatic stories by offering her own. Now 45 years old, the Bronx-bred activist has spent some two decades providing space for those testimonies.

In 2003, Burke launched an organization that would eventually become Just Be Inc., offering fellowship and programming meant to empower young women of color. One of its first campaigns, which Burke named Me Too, showed survivors of all genders that even their darkest trauma could be processed within a community — that together they could change what feminists have long called rape culture. Soon Burke's organization relocated from Selma, Alabama, near her alma mater of Auburn University, to Philadelphia. In 2015, having reached thousands of girls, she moved back to New York and put the program on hiatus.

Flash forward to October 15, 2017: Ten days after *The New York Times* published a landmark story on the sexual-assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein, the name of Burke's campaign went viral thanks to a tweet by Alyssa Milano. Burke felt blindsided. And now that scores of powerful men have been taken to task and #MeToo has come to define this historical moment, she is an icon — a reluctant icon, but one with the substance and vision to make the moment a movement.

The blowback against Me Too has been no less sweeping than its viral reincarnation. It looks like Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos dismantling Title IX on college campuses, privileging the reputations of young men accused of rape. It looks like Louis C.K. quietly returning to the stage, his routine unaffected after an initial halfhearted apology. It looks like Russell Simmons posting #NotMe after several women accused him of rape. It looks like Wall Street firms warning men, Mike Pence–style, to avoid off-site meetings with their women colleagues, the implication being that the real threat is false accusations. And it looks like Burke facing condemnation from certain black men who've accused her of race betrayal for publicly standing with the accusers of Simmons, Bill Cosby, Nate Parker and R. Kelly.



"I'm a black woman who loves black people, who has fought with and for black men almost as much as black women."



"A friend of mine sent me a message: 'Congratulations, people are talking about Me Too.' I was like, 'What?' "



"It's one thing to say, 'I'm so sorry if anyone was offended.' It's a different thing to take ownership and responsibility."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARISSA GALLO**

As she fields the vitriol, with sources ranging from anonymous trolls to White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Burke is subject to another sort of attention: She's constantly spotted in public and pulled into corners where survivors not only thank her for her work but often share, unsolicited, the stories of their own trauma. She has built some boundaries while navigating her newfound status as one of the most recognizable women in the country; other boundaries she formed after suffering abuse as a child.

In the hope of glimpsing the future of Me Too and its creator, we partnered with **dream hampton** — writer, filmmaker, activist and executive producer of *Surviving R. Kelly*, the Lifetime docuseries that broke records when it aired in January. (The series features Burke as an on-screen expert.) This past March, Burke and hampton met up in New Orleans; Burke, who spends much of her time on the road, was in town for the season-two premiere of the video series *Professional Black Girl*. Hampton reports: "New Orleans is a city that celebrates sex and fertility and the awakening of spring the ancient way — by playing naked and in public with a days-long parade. The city was an early home away from home for Burke, one where as a teenage activist she learned strategy from the Southerners she convened with. (During leadership-development camp her peers would teach her the ancient art of pussy popping, which we also discussed.) In person, she laughs easily. She flirts. She shows up for her girlfriends, supporting their projects and passions and gossip in group chats. She's a mother, and we often talk about what it's like to parent a 20-something.



"Burke remains not only a dreamer but, remarkably, an optimist. She knows there's no easy healing for the wounds exposed by #MeToo, and yet she stays in the work. We talked about the challenges of bringing the movement against sexual violence home to our black community — and the profound pain that comes with being targeted by other black people for doing so. We talked about self-care in the age of the online drag, about what healthy sex between teenagers might look like (hint: It involves the absence of R. Kelly) and about bracing for blowback. What unfolded during our conversation was a vivid picture of the movement and some ideas about where it might go — from consent to real male accountability and beyond."

PLAYBOY: We're in New Orleans, which is the site of much joy and obviously a lot of trauma. I'm thinking of course about Hurricane Katrina and what followed — what Naomi Klein has called "disaster capitalism." What does this city mean to you?

BURKE: Whew, New Orleans. I've been coming here since I was a young activist. An organization I was working with, Tambourine and Fan, had a big presence here. The founder of Tam and Fan was a guy known as Big Duck — a civil rights legend. But we were connected to Tam and Fan here, and New Orleans always represented at our annual leadership development camps. When they would come to camp, they were so full of life. Before they called it twerking, the New Orleans kids at camp taught us this dance called pussy popping. [laughs] You might not want to put that in there.

PLAYBOY: This is PLAYBOY. I don't see why we wouldn't.

BURKE: Ha! It was 1989, 1990, and I was coming from New York, doing the wop and shit, and they were like, "Pop that coochie." We did not dance like that, but the New Orleans kids were always so free. Everybody came from around the country. The people who ran the camp were from Alabama, and some of the elders were a little conservative. So we would have parties, little dances, and we'd be going off. They'd be like, "Y'all stop that! Y'all cut it out!" But Big Duck would say, "Let them children dance. Let them be free." He allowed us to do what we wanted. So I always associated New Orleans with freedom and that kind of black joy and unabashed blackness. But they also had a lot of tragedy. It's not a joke at all, but it was sort of a running theme that every year they had a different RIP T-shirt. Every year somebody in their community had been killed. But it felt as though they'd mastered how to walk through tragedy. They'd be sad, they'd be down, but they'd always find a reason to celebrate. I just love my folks from here, and I love this city.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about these camp dances, I think about how some of the blowback I got from making *Surviving R. Kelly* has devolved. In the beginning some of Kelly's fans on social media had the nerve to argue that, because he was acquitted in 2008, he was innocent. And then, after the Gayle King interview, I started getting a different kind of pushback: grown men saying, "Well, teenagers have sex" — as if teenagers exploring their own sexuality is an invitation to prey on them. I didn't respond to any of those people, but my response would have been "Yes, 14-year-olds should be exploring sex — with other 14-year-olds."

BURKE: Yes! With people in their own age group.

PLAYBOY: I bring this up because I know you're very sex positive.

BURKE: For sure.

PLAYBOY: So tell me about being sex

positive in your talks with teenagers when you also want to warn them about predators.

BURKE: It's such a prime age. By the time my body was changing, I'd already been molested. I wasn't experimenting because of my experience, but I was watching it happen around me. It was just pure curiosity. I remember friends wondering about the size and shape of real penises, and there's nothing wrong with that. The problem is when you have predators in the community. And when you compound that with being in low-wealth communities, you get this disgusting, for lack of a better way to put it, mix of grown men who know these girls are both blossoming and exploring —and they're also poor and want the kind of creature comforts most people want. They want their nails done. They want their cell phones paid for. They want their hair done. And the men use that to manipulate them. The problem I saw as an adult working with sixth-, seventhand eighth-grade kids was these older men, some who even looked young, coming around girls they knew were interested and dangling these things. You know, "I'll pay your cell phone bill" or "I'll take you to get your nails done," and they want favors in return. It's a manipulative relationship. The men are on the hunt for the particular kind of girl who's susceptible to this. And on the girls' end — we have all this research about brain development in young people and what they can and can't understand and handle. Yes, they may be sexual, but they're not in a position to deal with the kind of manipulation these men introduce into their lives this early. It's awful, and I've seen it happen over and over.

PLAYBOY: Before MeToo broke as a hashtag, conversations around street harassment had been trending. It was one of the first times I saw the organizing possibilities of storytelling on Twitter. There was so much power in amplifying people's stories, but it was also incredibly depressing to think how widespread these experiences are for girls and women.

BURKE: Actually, I met my daughter's father, my first real boyfriend, by being harassed. I ran track, so I was really skinny, but I had a butt. He would see me in the hallway in school and say stuff to me all the time, and I was embarrassed by it. I had my only pair of Girbaud jeans with the button fly and my little riding boots, and I was so happy — but then he started talking about my butt, and I didn't want to wear them anymore. I became aware of my body because of men in the streets saying stuff about having a booty. I grew up in the Bronx, and in the summer we would go downtown to Harlem. So you walked these gauntlets over and over again.

PLAYBOY: That's what it is, a gauntlet.

BURKE: That's the prime time when you want attention, but you want to have some control and some autonomy, and they take it from you. Because there's always the chance you can get smacked on the butt. Or if you don't respond in the right way, there's a chance that you'll have to fight, which is a real thing. I went through lots of painstakingly ridiculous things to avoid that. I think for so many young girls, black girls, we learn early how to figure out our own safety — how to navigate getting in and out of our building, in and out of the park, to the movie theater, all these spaces, without being harassed. It almost becomes second nature. So when people started asking me about harassment, I was like, "I'm worrying about not getting *attacked*." Harassment? I have built-in defenses for that. I didn't even think about it. God, we have so much accumulated shit around that alone.

For so many young girls, black girls, we learn early how to figure out our own safety.

When I had my daughter, Kaia — tall, slim, cute — I remember walking with her when she was about 12 or 13, already taller than me, and this group of boys were coming, older teenagers, maybe some in their early 20s, and there was this moment when a separate group of girls were coming in the guys' direction. The girls were teenagers, loud, laughing, whatever, and the boys were saying all types of stuff to them. I wanted so badly to say, "Leave these girls alone and just go on about your business." But I also didn't want to bring attention to my daughter. They got past, and the girls said whatever they said to them, and then they saw Kaia. One guy was like, "That's what I need.…" My daughter was petrified. She's looking at me; she doesn't know what to do. So I jumped in and said to them, "Can I help you?" They kind of straightened up, but what would she do if I wasn't here? She's not built the same way I was. She's not dealing with this all the time like I was. It's the first time I saw how not normal it is to have to go through life dealing with this shit.

PLAYBOY: I had the same experience, in Harlem. It was actually a factor in my picking up and leaving New York: I felt both homicidal and helpless. But back to the organizing possibilities of Twitter. I want to revisit the full origin story of how the MeToo hashtag became a movement.

BURKE: Days before #MeToo happened, white women on Twitter were organizing to have a day of absence. The week before Alyssa Milano tweeted "Me too," Rose McGowan was suspended on Twitter. People accused Twitter of putting her in Twitter jail for tweeting about Harvey Weinstein and the things she said happened to her. Women on Twitter were angry because they believed it was silencing McGowan, and the response was "We should have a day without women on Twitter. Let's show them what it looks like *blah, blah, blah*." The response of black women and women of color was "Oh, now y'all want to shut down Twitter when they bothering this white woman. What happened when Leslie Jones was being harassed on Twitter?" I was actually not a Twitter person; I had maybe 500 followers, so I was watching this from afar. Black women were like, "No, we're not getting off Twitter for a day. That's not for us. That's for you. You all rally around white women, but you don't rally around black women or women of color."

PLAYBOY: And of course *Day of Absence* is a 1965 play by Douglas Turner Ward about black people taking a day off of labor.

BURKE: Right. I thought it was funny. Then the day #MeToo started to trend, a friend of mine sent me a message: "Congratulations, people are talking about Me Too." I was like, "What?"

PLAYBOY: Because you had an organization named Me Too.

BURKE: I had an organization called Just Be Inc., and "Me Too" was a campaign that we started inside the program. Me Too grew on its own, separate from the organization, because so many people called us to do workshops or work with practitioners. We had Me Too T-shirts and paraphernalia and all this other stuff, separate from Just Be. My first thought was, If this trends now, people are going to think I got it from the hashtag. I had a fucking meltdown. I saw it on my friend's page, and I was like, "Please take this down. Don't push it further." I didn't know what was really happening, that she had nothing to do with making it popular. Then I started trying to figure out where it was coming from, and I didn't see it in our spaces. I didn't see black Twitter talking about it at all. I was so confused. My daughter told me how to set it up so you can see just a hashtag, and I saw that hundreds of people were tweeting it at this point. I was like, "Oh, fuck me."

I felt like my life's work had been taken overnight. This is the thing I care about more than anything, more than any work I've done. I've been trying to figure out how to make this — not become a worldwide phenomenon, but just get people to talk, because it's so hard to get people to deal with sexual violence. I really did not understand the power of social media in this moment, because I'm a 44-year-old black woman who is nobody in the grand scheme of things, right? Why would they listen to me?

But I think this perfect storm happened. I remember sitting up at night, looking at my laptop, watching this hashtag. This person, who I'm assuming was a white woman, had used the MeToo hashtag, and then she had a link in her tweet. So I just clicked the link randomly, and it opened up to a blog post, and it was her story. I read that story, and it was so sad, about her being assaulted on a college campus and how it affected her life. I was like, Oh, fuck, Tarana, you got to pull it together. I had been consumed with "This is my work. How am I going to save this work?" But her story is my work. I was trying to save the work, and the work was happening right in front of me.

So I was like, Let me regroup. I had a video in my cell phone from 2014, from a speech I'd given in Philly at the March to End Rape Culture, which used to be known as SlutWalk. We'd set up a table; we would have our little Me Too T-shirts and handouts, and I'd speak or I'd table, and this happened to be one of those times. In the video I'm wearing my Me Too shirt, and I'm making this speech. I put the video on Twitter and said, "You know, it's been amazing watching people over the last 24 hours really take to this concept that we created." And I just kind of took ownership in the moment.

PLAYBOY: But you also made space for other people. That's such a beautiful pivot in that story. I know the ego of wanting to publicly claim a thing and be proprietary, but it's not just ego; there's a history of erasure. But then there's the opening up to be, like, it's actually about the work.

BURKE: I keep thinking now, if I had gone down this other path and started a fight — because people were ready to fight — it could easily have been "I saw this white woman trying to take our stuff again." And then that would have died, and what would I have been contributing? It would have just come and gone. It would have been some urban legend, like the black woman who wrote *The Matrix*. People would've been like, "I heard *The Matrix* was started by a black person."

I was trying to save the work, and the work was happening right in front of me.

PLAYBOY: Right. That's a great analogy.

BURKE: So I put the video out, and my friends who had bigger platforms than mine tweeted out the video. Then people started saying, "Wait, who's this?" People kept tweeting at Alyssa Milano, saying, "You didn't start this. It already existed." To Alyssa's credit, she tweeted out my website, an apology and the origin story, which is what got people's attention. On the other end, organizers like Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, called me and said, "What can we do?" This is all happening in 24 hours. I'm like, "I don't know." Alicia was already booked to speak on *Democracy Now!*, and she invited me on with her — which speaks to something I'm always saying about black women: This is what we do. We would not be here if not for the generosity and connection of black women. I still thought, This is nice; for a week I get to talk about sexual violence. This is something I've been thinking about forever, but it's actually happening. But before the week was over I got another message from Alyssa, and she invited me on *Good Morning America*. Then I was like, "Oh, shit. This is for real."

PLAYBOY: What's been amazing is that it's not stopping. But then I get into full dystopia mode and think about what could be the blowback to #MeToo — I mean, Trump is absolutely the result of blowback to the idea and audacity of having a black man as president. So when I see a *New York Times* list of 201 high- powered men who have lost their jobs because of the #MeToo movement, I wonder what the blowback might be. There have been early wins, but also more conservative judges are being seated than at any other time in my life, and whether or not *Roe v. Wade* becomes the 2020 issue that immigration will surely be, it will be a pivotal battle that will be fought again. And then we see things like Russell Simmons posting #NotMe ——

BURKE: I think in some ways it's going to get worse before it gets better. What's discouraging is that I thought this was going to be an opportunity for us — and by "us," I mean the black community, because that's where my focus is as an organizer — to start peeling back layers of trauma and silence around sexual violence. But instead, so many in our community are planting our feet more firmly in patriarchy. Watching these black people who are going so hard in the other direction is heartbreaking. We might have changed a few minds — and I know those who are digging in may never change their minds—but I also try to lookat the whole picture. The question I always ask is "Are we accomplishing what we need to accomplish?"

PLAYBOY: And are we?



BURKE: The corporate people are going to change this, change that, but they often do things that are outward-facing, that make people happy enough to be quiet. There are traditional feminist conversations about women being promoted. We won't see that for a few years, when we get new statistics. We also have this fight happening around sexual violence on college campuses, but at the same time you have Betsy DeVos chipping away at Title IX and taking away these rights. We won't see that for a few years. So part of me is always thinking about what we can't see happening right now.

PLAYBOY: Let's unpack this: What is Title IX, and how is DeVos attempting to dismantle it?

BURKE: Title IX has been a tool a lot of schools have used to fight sexual violence. It gives you a framework to do investigations, to file complaints, and for survivors of sexual violence on campus to have some kind of recourse. What she's proposing is giving more rights to the respondent, the accused. She wants to allow respondents to cross-examine their accusers. She's operating from the idea that the way Title IX is implemented in these schools is unfair and allows for too many false accusations. I don't even think that's the language she uses, but it's like she's really doubling down on "boys will be boys," that young men have these moments and it shouldn't scar their lives forever. More important, she's calling to defund campus programs that we know work. They're doing what the right wing always does, which is trying to deregulate it federally so the states can regulate it, and then the states are like, "Oh well."

PLAYBOY: I imagine many PLAYBOY readers are men who might think that allowing someone who has been accused to crossexamine their accuser isn't such a bad thing. But that's not even how it would happen in an actual judicial process, correct?

BURKE: To be fair, the way it's set up is that the respondent would have to submit their questions to their attorney or an intermediary person, but it gets to the schools. And then you have them in a position to answer questions like "What were you wearing? Why did you come to my room?" We've been past this already. We have laws on the books that say a person's disclosure is evidence. That's why you see activists with signs that say I'M THE EVIDENCE. People's voices and stories have been accepted as evidence in cases of sexual violence. Now you're rolling that back and allowing an accused person on a campus to communicate to a victim, "Talk to me about why you let me kiss you like that if you didn't want to have sex." Imagine that. It sets up a situation that is retraumatizing for the accuser.

I think we can figure out what is fair and balanced. I also think that sometimes when we say "Believe women" and "Believe survivors," it's taken out of context. People may not understand that we say "Believe survivors" because up until now people have started with the premise that the accusers are lying, and that when people, particularly women, disclose, people start with a set of questions and a reasoning that says, "There has to be something you did."

The reality is that consent has always been the same…morally and in personal relationships.

PLAYBOY: Which is also different from a presumption of innocence, because you're actually shifting guilt onto the victim, or the accuser.

BURKE: My argument is that investigation into credible and serious claims of sexual violence should be respectful. You handle it with the gravity you would an attempted murder. You investigate. You collect evidence. You talk to the people involved. You deal with it. You don't start with "Are you sure? What did you do? Where were you at?"

PLAYBOY: I think what they're supposed to do is determine whether or not a story is credibl — not even believable — and investigate from there. But what you're saying is that the credibility is the first thing attacked.

BURKE: They attack the credibility immediately. Exactly.

PLAYBOY: We've seen this kind of pushback from men before. It brings back to mind the idea that we have to re-fight struggles. For me, this includes the black feminist struggle. Black men saying we're throwing them under the bus and piling on to multiple oppressions when we speak up about sexual and gender violence is an issue another generation of black feminists has already addressed. It's almost as if we have to start all over again. So in the face of all that, how do you take care of yourself, pace yourself, protect your actual safety?

BURKE: I have new boundaries. I'm also fresh out of fucks. I don't really have to deal with a lot of shit that I dealt with before, and I feel okay about that. I'm good with saying no. I'd kind of figured out how to navigate through life in ways that made me feel comfortable, and I felt comfortable in my skin. This recent visibility upended all that for a moment. I remember it was all fun and lovely in those first few weeks, and then CNN did a pullout video of me. They had makeup on me, and it was in extreme close-up, the way that they do, and when the video came out, it was the first time I got trolls — people tweeting and leaving comments like "God, she's hideous," "She's ugly," "Get her off the screen." My first thought was, I don't want my daughter to see this. Then it was, I don't want to do this anymore. I went into full panic mode.

Even public speaking, I still talk like I talk. I didn't want to deal with those things, and I've never had to, because I'm an organizer; I was always fine with other people doing the forward-facing work. But now I have this new set of responsibilities and this new role, and it hasn't slowed down like I thought it might. It's been nonstop. Bill Cosby may bring out the black men, but depending on what's happening in the news, I'm just as likely to be trolled by white people. During Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, it was the Trump people, white men and women, calling me all kinds of horrible names. When #MeToo India trended, I got Indian men sending me horrible messages that I couldn't even read.

PLAYBOY: I'm so mad. I'm so mad.

BURKE: It's because I'm not just a black

woman; I'm a black woman who loves black people, who has spent my life in service to black people, and who loves black men, who has fought side by side with and for black men almost as much as black women. And so to hear.… I know it's not real. What helps is when I go out into the world and get off social media.

PLAYBOY: I'm a big fan of deactivating. I understand that social media can be lifesaving for people who feel isolated, but I've had experiences that have pushed me to limit my online presence. Back in January, there was an uproar over a tweet of yours — the one that said, in part, "When should black men be held accountable for their predatory behavior?! And why is it my job to 'go after' white men?"

BURKE: When that first damn thing hit and that one tweet got taken out of context, Tariq Nasheed and his folks took that "white men" line and tried to make it like, "See, she told on herself. She's only going after black men." I was like, "The rest of the thread says, 'We have spent almost two years talking about white men.' "

PLAYBOY: Period.

BURKE: Right? Y'all weren't paying attention, because it didn't affect you. So we've talked about Harvey Weinstein ad nauseam, and Kevin Spacey and Matt Lauer and Louis C.K. and Charlie Rose. We've talked about nothing but white men. And honestly, black men have gotten away in this moment. There has been only Bill Cosby and R. Kelly. Russell Simmons has, at last count, at least a dozen credible accusations against him. A.J. Calloway is up to six public allegations. I didn't go after any of those men. We could easily have taken on any one of those and tried to make it into a thing, but the media didn't take it on. I'm still trying to unpack why. I think part of it is because it's black victims, black survivors. But these stories come and go. The bottom line is black men, by and large, have not been swept up — not in the music industry, not in the entertainment industry.

PLAYBOY: I want to get back to what you were saying earlier around the subject of Title IX. You were kind of acting out how the accused, the respondent, would ask questions like "Why did you kiss me like that if you didn't want to?" One of the things that became clear with the Kavanaugh case, and a lot of pundits said this afterward, was that both stories were credible. I believe Brett Kavanaugh didn't believe he did anything wrong. You were in the actual room during the hearing, yes?

BURKE: Yes. Kavanaugh changed me. I was in the room during the testimony, and it still sits with me in some ways. I've never experienced anything like that. The reality that this was not just an investigation but was affecting the makeup of the Supreme Court of the United States — something about that just keeps resonating with me. It was the lack of accountability and the fact that we think only in terms of crime and punishment as opposed to harm and harm reduction. What would it have looked like if he had just said, "I drank a lot at 17. I might have even had a drinking problem. And though I don't remember that day and those details, it doesn't sound unlike something I would have engaged in at that time. I didn't have a real understanding of consent. It doesn't sound like something I would do now, and I've spent the past 40 years trying to be a different person than I was at 17. But I do want to be accountable for any harm I might have caused you at 17."



PLAYBOY: That would have been amazing.

BURKE: It would have given her some closure and possibly some healing. It would have set an example for what accountability can look like in retrospect. But nobody wants to be the first. I feel the same way about Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton.

PLAYBOY: And I feel the same way about R. Kelly. What if, during his interview with Gayle King, he had said, "I need help." What if his oncamera breakdown had been a real moment of contrition?

BURKE: We are forgiving people. We're a forgiving country. It would have set the stage so differently. With Kava naugh, it would have shown leadership. In the case of R. Kelly, we're waiting for it. Black people are like, "Give me anything. Give me a reason."

PLAYBOY: Even his survivors. I interviewed all but two of them, and none of them said they wanted him in prison.

BURKE: But that's the other misconception. There's actual research that shows survivors of sexual violence don't think punitively at first. People don't immediately say, "I want them to go to jail." The relationship between survivor and perpetrator is often complicated, whether it's a family member or a community member or some person in leadership, and we worry how it will affect larger swaths of people. If R. Kelly had said, "I got a problem; they're barely legal" — not even incriminate himself — "They're barely legal, but I know I need help." Give us something.

Bill Clinton did that interview and got upset about the Monica Lewinsky questions, and then Hillary backed it up — even now. Yes, it was a consensual relationship, but she was 22 or 23, and you were 49 and the president. What would it have looked like for a former president of the United States to say, "I recognize that relationship

was an absolute abuse of power, and though it was consensual, I recognize that abuse of power creates an environment for sexual violence to happen"?

PLAYBOY: Bill Maher said on his show recently that the Dems need to stop apologizing. I thought that was, in his typical way, an incredibly reductive way to look at the possibilities of owning your shit.

BURKE: Yeah, because it's more than an apology. It's one thing to say, "I'm so sorry if anyone was offended." It's a different thing to take ownership and responsibility. The reality is that consent has always been the same.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean?

BURKE: I'm not talking about legally; I'm talking about morally and in personal relationships. The idea of needing consent to touch or to interact with somebody isn't new, but the laws have changed around it. Our understanding of bodily autonomy and these kinds of things has grown over time. So the understanding of consent has changed, and I get that. People use the same argument for Cosby: "Oh, it was a different time. People used a little bit of drugs, and it was fine. Everybody did Quaaludes, and it was fine." I'm like, "No, it wasn't." It may not have been against the law, though it probably was, but it was still wrong. Anytime you have somebody who's incapacitated and can't give consent, who doesn't have the ability to say yes, it's wrong. So consent is at the core of this. I want to talk about consent more, and I want to talk about it in the context of relationships and sex — and outside of them too. I think we have to examine the way we think about consent in our platonic, daily, normal relationships, because it influences other things. People touch people all the time — "Oh, I'm a hugger," and they just go right in and start hugging me.

PLAYBOY: I had to tell someone, "It's not 'I'm a hugger.' It's 'Do you hug?' " Brittney Cooper taught me that, because I was one of those people. It took only one time, and from then on I just said, "Do you hug?"

BURKE: "Do you hug?" I don't care what you are. It's so ridiculous to me. We need to have a different kind of consent education, and it's not "Let's teach a class on consent," but "Let's weave the idea of consent into everything we do." We can shift that as a cultural norm. I've gotten into the practice now, even when I take pictures, of saying "Do you mind if I put my hands here?" or "Do you mind if I put my arms around you?"

PLAYBOY: How about "Do you mind if I post this?"

BURKE: Oh, that's another one. That's a big one. But I don't like being touched. I never have. I have an aversion to touch from my history and all the rest of that. I've had to adjust, because people touch me all the time, which is such an oxymoron or irony or whatever. You love me because I talk about autonomy and consent.

PLAYBOY: And your own abuse.

BURKE: Right. But people don't ask how that affects you. So when you take pictures, their hands slide down your back or they rub your shoulder. Don't do that. Consent is largely about communication, and I think because people are so rigid in what they know, they can't see another way. So affirmative consent becomes "Oh, this is unsexy. I'm not going to say 'Can I insert my penis into your vagina?' " No. But there is a way to talk about it: I tell boys, "You want a woman to tell you that she wants you." We also have to resocialize girls, because we've been socialized for eons to be coy and to play hard to get and all that, which leads into the sex-positivity thing. This is why narrative and narrative shift is so important. We have to tell different stories. We have to create new norms.

Going back to the part about race, I do think we have a special situation in communities of color and in the black community. Honestly, I think we won't see a culture shift until we start with children. The push that should be happening is not for consent but for curriculums — culturally competent curriculums that also deal with sexual violence, sexuality, gender and all the rest. Start in kindergarten and then layer it on, year by year, so you'll have children who have been learning about boundaries, respect and gender norms from a young age, and it's just ingrained in their minds. We won't have a different society until we reeducate and resocialize, but that takes so many people being in agreement.

PLAYBOY: But it can also happen with a few, and it can happen where we are.

BURKE: When people ask me about restorative justice or transformative justice, I say we have to have both. Imagine a world that has these ideas about consent, that has a new dynamic around justice, while figuring out what safety looks like for us right now. We're figuring out what justice and accountability look like in the short term, but we don't just have to imagine that world; we have to put it in practice in small ways and wherever we have some control, in our institutions, in our communities. Create models that can be replicated, that we can grow from. It's one thing to sit in a conference and talk about restorative justice and transformative justice and how this doesn't work and we need something new, and it's another thing to take that imagination and put it into practice so people can see that these things work.

I keep saying we need five to 10 years. This is an idea — I don't know how well it works or doesn't work. I've seen it work on a small scale. I feel it can work on a larger scale, but we need time and space. We have to try something different. We have to take away the noise about the perpetrators and the this and the that and focus on the people who have already suffered, who are already dealing with sexual violence, already holding this trauma, and the action it's going to take to keep more people from doing that. Our work is about healing and action. That's really it. All this other stuff about who's getting taken down, the gender war and *blah, blah, blah* — it's all noise. It takes away from this cultural work we have to do on the ground.

So you have the millions and millions of people who said "Me too," and folks forget about them. We wouldn't be here if not for the labor of survivors, people who labor to tell their stories, who labor to come forward, however hard that is. So that happens, and it builds this huge whatever it is we're in, and then folks immediately pivot away from that, as opposed to saying, "My God, this is a moment for us to examine culture, to look at what's happening around us." How did we get to the place where in the span of 24 hours you can have millions of people around the world all agree that their lives have been affected by this one thing? I always use the example of disease: If tomorrow we woke up and 12Àmillion people said, "I also have this disease," and it just spread like wildfire and more people every day kept saying, "I have it now," imagine if our response was "Well, shit, how are we going to date now in this age of this new disease?" Or "I'm not taking meetings with that disease." It's ridiculous. We create all this distraction instead of dealing with the heart of the matter.

There are three questions: How the fuck did we get here? We know lots of people can answer that question about rape culture and misogyny and patriarchy. How do we stop it? Because, my God, these numbers are awful. And then, for the future, how do we make sure we move forward in a way that gets us as far away from this as possible?

That's our work, period.

PLAYBOY: That's amazing.

BURKE: Anything else is not worth even talking about. ■

We wouldn't be here if not for the people who labor to come forward, however hard that is.





“You need to ask yourself, Does the Clitorizer 3000 still spark joy?”

VIVIANE Leigh

Photography by **ARTHUR ST. JOHN @ARTHURSTJOHN**
Location **BIG MIKE MANSION**







What's your name and ethnicity?
Viviane Leigh, Chinese and Vietnamese Australian

Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Where do you live now?
In Perth Australia. I grew up here in Australia with the sandy beaches and long sunny days. Right now I am living in Melbourne but travel often.

Favorite style of music?
I love all types of music from rnb/ hip hop to rock. I don't really have a favourite style.

Favorite artist?
Gang of Youths. I love their song Magnolia.

Favorite movie of all time?
My favourite movie is The Green Mile. It has a beautiful story line.

Are you athletic? If so, what's your favorite sport?
I love Pilates and have practised for many years.

How often do you work out?
I practise Pilates 5 x a week.

Describe your perfect man.
Confident, kind and warm hearted. I love a man with a good sense of humour and knows what he wants from life. I definitely choose brain over brawn.

Describe your perfect date.
My perfect date would be for my guy to show me a bit about who he is but a nice glass of wine with a view would be great too.

Favorite body part on you? Favorite body part on a man?
My favourite body part is my breasts because I think they make me look very feminine. My favourite body part in a man is his eyes. Eyes can show the most expression.

Any pet peeves?
Bad body odour is a real turn off for me. I also dislike slow walkers, they always seem to only appear in front of you when you are in a rush to get somewhere.

Tell us something about you not too many people know.
Many people don't know that I've mountain biked 400km in South Africa for charity. It's a real challenge for me as before that I never really cycled before.

If you can change any one thing about you, what would it be?
I would change my height so I could be a catwalk model! I'm quite petite, I'd love to be 5'9 for a day.

Do you like to travel? Where is your favorite vacation destination?
I love travelling. My favourite vacation is Bali, I love how relaxing it is there.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Being taken seriously as a fashion model because I'm petite and curvy. It's also a real challenge to represent myself as Australian in modelling as some people say I don't "look Australian". I'm not sure what Australian is meant to look like but I'm as Australian as it gets!











One of my biggest achievements was choosing to shoot for Playboyplus. I was a little nervous to shoot nude for the first time but I loved it. Being a PlayboyPlus' muse of the month for June is one my greatest achievements as a model.

Congrats on your Playboy feature, what does this mean to you?
I'm so happy to featured in Playboy. I've grown up admiring the beautiful cover girls of magazines and never thought I'd be lucky enough grace the pages of Playboy.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
I see myself having been in many publications, working for amazing brands and having successful acting roles on screen. I'm also a big believer in collecting memories not material things. So I hope to have met my soul mate whom I can travel the world with and create many lasting memories.

Any last words you would like to share with our readers?
I'm actually an accountant, I've studied and currently working as one as well as modelling. I'm a hardworking down to earth girl, which is from my upbringing as I'm the daughter of refugees from Vietnam. I have two dogs whom I love very much, Charlie the Labrador and Loki the Chihuahua.



ILLUSTRATION BY **SAM RODRIGUEZ**

THE LONG ROAD TO PRESIDENT PETE

He has captivated millions despite no national governing experience, vague policy positions and zero Twitter feuds with the president. Can Mayor Pete sustain his momentum through debate season?

BY **ALEX THOMAS**

Nine days before Pete Buttigieg officially declared his bid for the White House, a woman approached the South Bend, Indiana mayor as he was waiting to board a flight to Manchester, New Hampshire, his third trip to the state since announcing his presidential exploratory committee in January. "She said, 'Everyone's coming up to you and saying hello,' " Buttigieg tells PLAYBOY. "And I said, 'Well, yeah, it's campaign season.' She said, 'Oh, what channel are you a reporter for?' "

He says that the encounter had been "a reminder that there are lots of people we need to reach — and also that we need to make sure this is a project of substance. Substance is key to outliving the flavor-of-the-month period."

Buttigieg's campaign raised an impressive $7 million in the first quarter of 2019, bolstered by a March town hall on CNN that resulted in more than 22,000 donations within 24 hours. Soon after, Buttigieg's team was negotiating a televised town hall with Fox News, perhaps because that woman at the airport watches Fox News. Indeed, if she watched any other network — MSNBC at night, whoever airs *Ellen* during the day, CNN at any hour — she would have recognized the 37-year-old who has become the most unexpected and fascinating candidate in the 2020 contest.

This June, at the first Democratic primary debate in Miami, Buttigieg is expected to cross swords with as many as 19 competitors. Millions will tune in. Should he perform mildly well, anyone faintly interested in politics will know Mayor Pete's last name — and, finally, how to pronounce its trio of syllables. (It's *boot-edgeedge*.) Should he perform above average, he could wipe out half the field overnight. Buttigieg knows this is the advantage his rising-star status offers.

"The only point of doing this, especially coming from an underdog position, is thinking that you're going to introduce ideas that need to be there," he says. "If we continue to perform, the debates could be a very good environment, because it will be just that many more people watching — hopefully people who will have the same response as people who tuned in earlier."

The whispered problem is that two months before the debates, Buttigieg had yet to publish any official policy position on his website. He has instead spent his time doubling down on selling his campaign as grassroots, likely to temper the ascent that has propelled him to the near-front of the pack as the first millennial presidential candidate.

"You'll continue to see us in every corner of the country, with an emphasis on the early states, because for a grassroots, underdog project like ours, that's where you have the best chances at exceeding expectations," he says. "The beautiful thing about this process is that a janitor in Iowa may have as much to offer a candidate as a senator from somewhere else."

Buttigieg admits he's been surprised by the "dizzying" pace of campaigning. While other candidates' teams have launched strong operations in early voting states like Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, his has remained shoestring. On his third visit to New Hampshire, for example, Buttigieg had only one paid staffer in the state, according to his campaign spokesperson, longtime Democratic strategist Lis Smith. It's an endearing quality, but it's not at all sustainable.

For now, "the most important thing is not to get caught up in your own coverage," Buttigieg tells me during a tight 45-minute interview at a small café in Manchester — the largest city in the state, which hosts an early primary election. The night before, he sold out a trendy wine bar in Washington, D.C. where

ticket prices ranged from $25 to $1,000. Here in Manchester, his campaign scrambled to move from a brewery to an art museum to accommodate a larger than expected turnout. At both of these appearances, the overwhelming show of support felt both worrisome and obvious. Buttigieg's campaign seemed unprepared. He did not.

After first-quarter fund-raising numbers ranked Buttigieg fourth behind Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris and Beto O'Rourke — and a trio of polls ranked him third behind Joe Biden and Sanders — everyone simultaneously seemed to realize that the mayor of Indiana's fourth-largest city was a legitimate candidate. But as Hillary Clinton can attest, poll results can be everything from misleading to flat-out incorrect.

"I don't expect to learn that much from the polls in the next three months other than gathering validation of our name recognition," he says. "We need to not be reactive but prospective. You're not competing against any one candidate or combination of candidates. You're competing against the house."

The house includes a roster of well-qualified progressive senators who have been billed as the Democrats' saviors since 2016 but who continue to blur in popularity and in and out of the media's attention span. To say the Democrats' united front is buckling would be an understatement. D.C. insiders know the road to winning the nomination will be a bloodbath. There is no clear front-runner. But that's why the mayor has been able to stand out.

Much ink has been spilled about Buttigieg's credentials, but let's rehash it for posterity's sake. He is the first openly gay Democrat to seek the White House but has no interest in selling himself as the LGBTQ candidate. He served in Afghanistan as a Navy Reserve intelligence officer but isn't promoting himself as a hawk. He went to Harvard and became a Rhodes scholar, but he does not brag about either high honor in prepared remarks. His time at McKinsey, a top management consulting firm that draws the ire of progressives, is muted throughout his campaign.

Instead, he frequently reminds crowds that he is the mayor of a city in flyover country — a relatively scandal-free city that he describes as "the exact kind of geography the Democratic Party has struggled to be connected with. The South Bend story is such an important part of what I have to say about America. We're not a wealthy, homogenous, tidy college town; we're a diverse community with a complex industrial past. All of us have a mix of advantage and disadvantage in our story."

A version of that line has been delivered not once, not twice, but ad nauseam. In Manchester it was repeated across two speeches — once to those inside the art museum and a second time to those stuck in the parking lot. Outside, when crowds began to grumble about having reserved useless tickets, one man loudly complained, "I'm curious what the point was having everyone sign up ahead of time. They want you on the mailing list is what it is. Great way to lose a voter." Then Buttigieg popped up on a bench and started proselytizing — a jab at Beto O'Rourke. "I've heard that the way to ingratiate yourself to voters is to stand on things," he quipped.

The next day, Buttigieg held an event in Concord, this time in a bookstore. It was a fraught venue that filled quickly, with the temperature rising to an uncomfortable level. Most in attendance couldn't see the candidate. All they could hear was Buttigieg's voice, noticeable for its youth. It wasn't freighted with the gravelly rumble of Biden or Sanders. It carried none of the condescension of the establishment. It was his alone.

• • •

Buttigieg really came onto the national stage two years ago, in 2017, when he launched a bid for chair of the Democratic National Committee. The committee was wounded after the 2016 election fractured the party; Buttigieg thought he could put Humpty Dumpty together again. He ultimately dropped out of the race, but he did elevate himself as a national figure, and the political class studied up on his biography.

As he began to test the viability of his presidential ambition, New York media fixture Molly Jong-Fast hosted an intimate meet-and-greet that included BuzzFeed editor in chief Ben Smith and actor Zak Orth. She tells me the Midwestern mayor excites her because "he's the opposite of Donald Trump in every aspect of his life and policy. He chose to fight in the war; Trump was a draft dodger. He is on the young side; Trump is on the old side. He learned Norwegian to read a book; Trump has never read a book. Religion is important to him; religion is not important to Trump." According to Jong-Fast, the crowd of some 50 influentials was nothing short of blown away by the long-shot candidate's résumé.

As mayor of South Bend since 2012, Buttigieg has suffered only one major scandal, known around town as "the police tapes case." Just before he took office, someone discovered that the South Bend police chief had been secretly recording internal phone calls. Some of the tapes allegedly caught white cops making racist remarks, including about the chief himself, who is black. The incident led Buttigieg to dismiss the chief, whom he describes in his book, 2019's Shortest Way Home, as "well liked," while no action was taken against the white cops. At press time, the tapes had not been released, their fate tied up in state court. Buttigieg says he hasn't heard the recordings. The lawsuits have cost South Bend taxpayers nearly $2 million, according to the South Bend Tribune.

Today Buttigieg presents that scandal as "an opportunity to explain how much I have learned the hard way about the importance of these issues…some of the questions of trust and the relationship between policing and communities and color." Roughly a quarter of South Bend's population is black.

During his first term he also launched an initiative to knock down or fix up 1,000 vacant houses in 1,000 days. Some locals claim the plan was blatant gentrification disguised as social good. Regina Williams-Preston, who lived in one of the affected neighborhoods, is now running for Buttigieg's seat in City Hall. And in 2015, he remarked that "all lives matter," though he has since apologized for that phrasing — which has been used to dismiss police brutality in black communities — claiming he didn't understand it at the time.

Currently, none of these missteps have marred Buttigieg at the national level, but if he hopes to push past Trump in the general election, he'll need to prove to communities of color he's worth voting for. Although the number of eligible millennial voters is on track to nearly outnumber baby boomers for the first time in history, the 2016 election saw black turnout at the polls decrease for the first time in 20 years, according to the Pew Research Center. A proven utterance of "all lives matter"? Once Democrats start playing dirty, that line may prove to be gold for any opponent looking to own the black vote.

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In Manchester, Buttigieg shakes a long line of hands and fields questions from supporters. A pair of teachers ask him to say hello questions from supporters. A pair of teachers ask him to say hello to their classroom on their iPhones, and a former marine, followed by a young woman, asks if he'll support student voting rights. Another man in line doesn't want a photo; he uses his time to ask Buttigieg if he'll consider doubling NASA's budget. Somebody shakes his hand and tells him, "You're my son's age."

After the museum empties, his team heads back to the brewery. Buttigieg looks like any politician after a relentless day of campaigning. His sleeves are scrunched up to his elbows, the lines on his face deeper than they were in the morning. Somebody hands him a root beer in a glass bottle, and I mention how the wide field of questions mirrors a scene from Parks and Recreation.

"I HAVE A LOT OF *PARKS AND REC* MOMENTS."

Buttigieg nods. "I have a lot of Parks and Rec moments," he says.

While most of the candidates have singled out the president in their primary campaigns, Buttigieg asserts that Trump isn't worth his energy, at least not yet. When asked about the president's tendency to govern by signing stacks of executive orders, Buttigieg says he is "more interested in our agenda than his agenda." He does have a simile for the president, though, saying 45 "almost became like a computer virus that breaks a computer by tying up all its processing power. That's kind of what's happening to the media with this president. I'm interested in changing the channel, and it will take a lot of discipline to do that. But," he adds, "that's the project, not just to punch back — which you have to do sometimes — but to get people thinking differently."

In a rare move for a presidential hopeful, Buttigieg has sparred openly with the vice president, who was governor of Indiana during Buttigieg's first term as mayor and the early part of his second term. More important, Mike Pence was governor when Buttigieg came out to his constituents, in 2015. In his book, Buttigieg writes that "Pence's fanaticism was hard to overlook, knowing how it had impacted me as a mayor — and as a person." As governor, Pence signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which allowed businesses to deny service to LGBTQ customers and was so disastrous that the state later hired a public relations firm to try to repair its image.

Pence is a useful villain for Buttigieg. He's not any more wellliked than Trump (at press time, RealClearPolitics put Trump's favorability at 42.6 percent; Pence's hovers at 40 percent), and because of their at-odds history in Indiana, it's hard to accuse Buttigieg of sketching an adversary to boost his credibility. At another event in early April, Buttigieg told a crowd, "That's the thing I wish the Mike Pences of the world would understand: If you've got a problem with who I am, your problem is not with me; your quarrel, sir, is with my creator." (Pence declined PLAYBOY's request for comment.)

When I ask if he believes that legislating morality, and thus social conservatism, has become more prominent under the Trump administration, Buttigieg says, "I think the president made a fairly cynical decision to align himself with the evangelical right because that was necessary to bring him to power."

• • •

Buttigieg has no choice but to play up his youth — he's the same age as Ivanka Trump — but as his popularity has surged, he has had to work harder to articulate what he stands for lest he get boxed in as that guy who could be our "first young president." He tells me he's "most interested in launching legislation" and that "bad policies will need to be replaced. The question is what are we going to replace them with." It's a good question, and it feels strange to think Mayor Pete is running for president without answers.

His "concerns" (at press time, they had not been dictated as official positions) include promoting national service; investing in public education and increasing resources and compensation for public school teachers; reducing barriers to college education; overhauling the Pell Grant program; creating alternative pathways to success for young people who do not attend college; securing a woman's right to choose; and "structural reform" to the U.S. government, including abolishing the electoral college and expanding the Supreme Court.

To suggest that any of these topics aren't millennial at heart would be foolish. Despite his Ivy League pedigree, Buttigieg's experiences are typical of his generation. He supports abolishing the electoral college, for example, because twice in his lifetime a Democratic candidate has won the popular vote but lost the general election. He grew up when text messaging took off and was in college on September 11, 2001. He had a MySpace account and attended Harvard when Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook. He met his husband, Chasten, who teaches junior high school theater in Indiana, on the dating app Hinge. His dogs, Buddy and Truman, are famous on Twitter.

Although he's nearly a decade younger than the skateboarding, punk-rock Beto O'Rourke, Buttigieg's youth feels different. He's passionate without being eager, measured without seeming desperate to be liked. His political icons are neither surprising nor contentious. At the age of 18 he wrote an essay praising Sanders, then a congressman, which he closed with the following: "I have heard that no sensible young person today would want to give his or her life to public service. I can personally assure you this is untrue."

When asked about his political influences, Buttigieg reaches back further. "The JFK presidency," he says, "was one that I thought was important and compelling, because you had somebody who was motivated by this desire to serve, who had a contagious desire to serve." He seems to allude to similarities between himself and Kennedy, saying, "You had somebody with a good popular touch but not afraid to be intellectual and, very significantly, somebody who had a generational appeal that was really powerful."

The Kennedy comparison hasn't been made much by the media — perhaps because we have compared one too many politicians to JFK and have learned our lesson. But Buttigieg is arguably the most Kennedyesque candidate in a field of 20. Kennedy remains our nation's second-youngest president; Buttigieg would be our youngest. Kennedy made history as the first Catholic president; Buttigieg would be our first openly gay president. More than anything, Kennedy had an endearing quality. You wanted to be around the man and felt you were a part of something by supporting him. Buttigieg's supporters seem to have a similar fixation. Several long months lie between this paltry Kennedy comparison and the ballot box, but Buttigieg looks as good as anybody in the race. And after the debates, we may finally have a front-runner. ■


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ANTHONY RAYNARD

Feel the rush

"Winners never quit and quitters never win". These are words that one of South Africa's top Motocross riders Anthony Raynard, lives by, and the reason why he is making big strides in this adrenalin-fuelled sport. The rush in motocross is mostly around the jumps. Now add speed and other adrenalin junkies and motocross racing as a sport comes to life. Anthony gives us his personal take on what it has been like in the sport since he started racing at the age of 13.

Photography by **Ruben Louw**



What led to you taking up motocross?
I moved from Johannesburg to Cape Town at the age of 7. My first 3 years in Cape Town was occupied by playing soccer, until close family friends introduced me to motocross. As a 10-year-old visiting the motocross track for the first time was exciting yet very intimidating and yes you guessed right, I crashed hard on my first ride! As all kids do, we fall, we get back up, and try again. The rest is history.

When did you decide to start racing competitively?
For the first few years the sport was a pure hobby until I started improving and getting better race results locally in Cape Town. The next step was to take regional and national racing at the age of 13.

What has been your most memorable moment in motocross?
There are so many incredible memories over the years but two definitely stand out for me. Firstly, being chosen as team captain to represent South Africa at the 2011 Junior World Champs in Belgium. Secondly, winning my first ever senior SA National Championship in 2012.

You were head-hunted to join a professional racing team back in 2008, could you tell us more?
I received a call from a businessman that was setting up a professional race team in SA. He followed my results over the years and wanted me to be part of the team. It was a huge breakthrough for me and the start of my young racing career.

Motocross is an extreme sport and as the saying goes, every sport has its injuries. Have you been seriously injured and how did you cope mentally with the set back of an injury?
Luckily I have been one of the fortunate riders that has had minor injuries considering how dangerous the sport is. Only a few broken bones including my collarbone, right index finger and left hand. I believe in remaining headstrong no matter the situation and keeping mind over matter at all times.

Fitness and nutrition is key to being successful in any sport and extreme sport is very taxing on your body. Could you tell us more about your fitness and nutrition regime?
I train 3-4 times a week on the bike and 6 times a week off the bike which includes gym, running, mountain biking and yoga. I live a healthy, balanced lifestyle when it comes to nutrition. I don't restrict myself from any food groups however leading up to races I make sure to eat enough good carbohydrates and protein to keep me fuelled.

How do you prepare mentally for race day?
I make sure that all my race admin is done a day or two prior to race day so that I can have a calm, relaxed day before the event. Also, being sure to get enough sleep and visualise the track I am racing. Sometimes I will watch racing videos or past events to get my head in the game.

Who has been your inspiration?
100% my dad. He's been my biggest fan through every race day no matter the result. We have travelled the world together for racing and I have been fortunate enough to have my dad as my best friend and team member through the years.

What is the hardest part of motocross?
Not crashing haha! On a serious note, staying safe and injury free in race season is for sure the biggest challenge. We are constantly pushing the limits and one miscalculated move can cost you a season or your life.

Motocross is rated as one of the most adrenalin-fuelled sports, where did your confidence come from?
I have high standards and a strong work ethic which I believe if you put in the hard, long hours the results will come naturally. Be positive, keep grinding and build that confidence.

Over the years of racing you have gained some fantastic sponsors, could you tell us who they are?
I am extremely privileged to be backed by incredible brands and represent them on and off the track. For 2019, my main sponsors are Yamaha South Africa, Tintswalo Racing, Dragon Energy Drink, TW Steel, Ace Sports Distribution, Alpinestars, Puma and Pirelli.

Sponsorships need to be a win-win relationship. As a sponsored athlete, what do you feel are your obligations to your sponsors?
To be a true brand ambassador and represent the brand in the >>


DRAGON
YAMAHA
MOTUL
PIRELLI
KYB


Anthony
RAYNARD
23
STARS

highest regard on and off the track. To be loyal, grateful and proud of the partnership.

Other than motocross, what other sports or hobbies are you involved in?
Living in Cape Town gives you so much variety for new sports. I really enjoy running and take part in a few events during the year. Hiking and trail running are big favourites to explore this beautiful city!

Do you have an off-season from racing and what do you do during that time?
Our season runs from February to October which gives me three months off-season. During this time, I take about 2-3 weeks off the bike and then start prepping for the next season again. I also enjoy the festive season to be with friends and family in Cape Town or abroad.

If you could race anywhere in the world on any track, where would it be?
I recently returned from a trip to the USA and was able to ride on my all-time dream track called Glen Helen Raceway. I would love to compete on this track in the near future. ■





NIKITA ROKITA

Photography by **BRIAN B HAYES**









Nikita can you tell our Playboy readers more about yourself?
Sure! I was born and raised in Chicago, IL. My entire life, I've always had this driven and determined spirit within me. Most people would call me a go-getter. I believe you have to be willing to take risks in order to get to places that most people have not yet been before. Being this risk taking, motivated chick I am, becoming an entrepreneur came very natural for me — and at a very young age! My first very successful business took off when I was just 12 years old, coding for MySpace.

I learned so much about myself, and about the foundation of who I wanted to be, very early on in life. Entrepreneurship, to me, has always been about going in my own direction, creating something, making a change, and leaving a positive impact in the world. And because I've always been so driven, I graduated from high school an entire year early just so I could get a head start on my college career. So, I moved to Chicago, IL at 17, where I graduated with my degree in psychology. Once I graduated college, before I knew it, I was on a one-way flight to LA, just me and my cat, and a whole lot of unknown possibilities to come. Never considered getting into the restaurant industry, yet, here I am! Never thought I would be a model, yet.... here I am! And I completely love it. I always trust in myself. I know whatever choice that I make will always work out for me. And, so far, it always has.

Tell us what it was like doing your Playboy shoot with that beautiful cat?
Ha! It was so fun honestly. It was really quite sporadic as well. My photographer was expecting us to hit the beach and was fully prepared for a photo shoot in Malibu. But the morning of, my makeup artist and I were talking about how cute it would be to do a photo shoot with my cats, Something I've always wanted to do, because they are just absolutely gorgeous cats — Savannah cats. They are a hybrid between an African serval and a domestic cat. So although we sort of threw my photographer for a loop that day, he was completely down with it! It has to be one of the most fun shoots I've had to date!

How do you stay in such amazing shape?
I follow a strict keto diet, wear heels every day (it's a work out), use body slimming wraps and of course shopping... a lot. That's my cardio.

What's it like living in Hollywood?
I actually recently got my own house in the Hollywood Hills. I love living here! It's completely different than living in Hollywood, much quieter and away from all the chaos!

We see that you are always around gorgeous cars. What's your favorite car and why?
I'm driving it! My Tesla P100D, I am in love with it. I can't imagine driving anything else! But in my ideal world, because I love McClaren's so much, my dream car would be an electric, self driving McClaren. Or maybe I'll just get lucky, and Tesla will come out with a two door model S with butterfly doors. I'd even settle for the doors they have on the model 3. I'm totally flexible. Not picky at all.

Do you travel when you model? Where is your favorite destination?
Yes, often! My favorite destination? Hmm. I've been to so many different places, each so unique in their own way, all around the world. But I can't say that I've favorited any destination over the other.... I guess I haven't been there yet!

We have millions of male readers so can you tell them what you look for in a man?
A man that's secure with himself. That doesn't need my attention constantly. For a man to be independent is super important to me, because I am always working as well! I'm in love with my work, so he should never get jealous of that. I would love for him to have his own group of friends, have guy nights out, and understand that those are things that I need as well! So with that being said, he also has to get along well with my girlfriends, and vice versa with his friends! I mean at the end of the day — I want a man, not a puppy dog.

What does a man have to do to get your attention?
A lot.

Can you describe what would be a sexy night at home?
A sexy night at home for me would be after a long day of shopping on Rodeo Drive at La Perla, dimming the lights and having candles lit throughout the house, a house full of flowers with rose pedals on the floors and one bed, having a dinner ready with my favorite drink or choice, Cristal.

What is your number one turn-on and number one turn-off?
Turn on: there's nothing sexier to me than a man who knows how to dress. In a classy, yet subtle way. No need to draw attention with huge logos and name brands. You're not a walking billboard. Keep it classy.

Turn off: A cocky guy is one of the biggest turn offs for me. Also poor hygiene! A guy should always make sure he has fresh breath and smells nice! I think that the importance of cologne is so underestimated. It's probably the sexiest thing a guy can wear.

How can our readers follow you on social media?
Instagram! @keytonikita









REBEL EROTICA

Having stunned the art world with her meteoric rise, Helen Beard is out to challenge our deepest assumptions about what sexuality should look like

BY **HOLLY BLACK**

Helen Beard loves sex.

"Sex is a fundamental; it's something everyone gets up to," she says, surrounded by her work — a painted orgy of yellow phalluses, pink labia and purple breasts. On display in her studio on the semi-industrial outskirts of Brighton, England, Beard's paintings float between the realms of abstraction and figuration. It can take a minute to identify the large-scale curves, folds and orifices, especially in a world where humans are becoming accustomed to digesting visual culture on minuscule screens. But spend enough time with Beard's work — at one of her rare London exhibitions or on Instagram (@helenbeardart) — and you'll find a depiction of sex that, unlike the sanitized and chauvinistic embraces so common in traditional figurative art, insists on an equal distribution of pleasure.

"I like the power it gives the female form," the 47-year-old artist says of her approach. "It's not hiding behind anything. When you see it that big, you can't avoid that it's a vagina."

• • •

Beard started using pornography as source material long before it became ubiquitous.

“I’m after that explosion, so I put colors together that will resonate and cause friction, like the feelings you get from the act of sex itself.”

“I used to go and buy top-shelf magazines,” she says. “I would travel Europe to get the more hardcore ones. But then the internet arrived.” Building a collection of porn thus began as a necessity — “You can’t just ask your friends to send pictures of them having sex” — but she has always taken care to avoid sexual imagery defined by unrealistic depictions of the female body. “So often it’s skinny women and muscly men,” she says. “I want a rounded view of the world, with lots of different people in it.”

That impulse is abundantly clear in *The Song of Self*, a new work created exclusively for PLAYBOY. Here, female affirmation is front and center. A green band suggests folds of stomach flesh, while the figure’s breasts appear realistically pendulous. “She’s natural, slouchy and pleasuring herself,” Beard explains. “It’s about body positivity. Women have sexual needs and can get pleasure that doesn’t have to come from penetrative sex. Quite often, in porn particularly, it’s all about men’s gratification.”

It’s the antithesis of the airbrushed, unattainable bodies that still dominate the media — and that, admittedly, have appeared on countless pages of this magazine. Yes, it would be careless not to recognize PLAYBOY's contribution to the skewed male gaze on pleasure, and Beard is happy to discuss the tensions that might arise from this collaboration.

“I was a bit worried when I first got the call, because I am a feminist. I didn’t know if it was the right standpoint to be coming from,” she says. “I garnered a lot of opinions and ultimately determined that it’s great that PLAYBOY is reaching outto female writers and artists. It would be foolish to say no when women are finally getting their say. If you want to change public opinion, you need to do it within the realm of a lot of different audiences.”

• • •

Creating confrontational and widely viewed work wasn’t always Beard’s goal. For years, the Birmingham-born artist painted explicit images of humans pleasuring one another as a sidebar to her day job as a stylist and art director in the film industry. The notion that anyone other than her close friends or family would see her work was unfathomable — until Damien Hirst came along.

In 2016, when rail strikes brought London-bound commuter trains to a standstill, Beard’s husband, who worked as Hirst’s creative director, was forced to set up shop in his wife’s studio. During a Snapchat exchange with his boss concerning Halloween preparations, he sent a photo of his costume. Hirst was enamored of the Technicolor canvases in the background.

The notorious Young British Artist and entrepreneur had to have Beard’s *Blue Valentine*, an ostensibly abstract piece that camouflages a phallus penetrating an orifice. From there, Hirst pushed Beard to produce a series of larger paintings to be displayed at his Newport Street Gallery in South London as part of the 2018 *True Colours* group exhibition. Understandably, it was all a little daunting.

“I had a bit of a wobble the night before the opening. I emailed Damien and said, ‘I don’t know if I want anyone to ever see these paintings. I just want to stay in Brighton, quietly painting them on my own!’ But he said, ‘Don’t worry, everyone is going to love them.’ ”

Hirst’s prediction proved true. Since the exhibit’s opening, Beard has been inundated with requests for her work, including several commissions from Philip Niarchos, one of the world’s most influential collectors. The abrupt rise in demand has created stress, but Beard sees it as an opportunity to keep shining a light on underrepresented bodies. Although she began her art career painting heterosexual couples, informed by her own experiences, Beard has expanded her perspective to queer intimacy, inspired by the sexual fluidity embraced by younger generations, including her teenage children and their friends.

“I love that the world is going that way,” she says. “I’m diversifying to include all kinds of sex. It’s really important to portray everything.”

• • •

The vibrant and inclusive sexuality of Beard’s pieces is mirrored in the intuitive playfulness of her process. Although her canvases are full of solid planes of color, the brushwork, fine yet rigid, adds a texture that mimics the ripples of the body. Originally she was seduced by the flat finish of acrylic paint — thanks in part to her heroes Michael Craig-Martin and Patrick Caulfield — but she hit her stride with oils. “It does feel much more intimate,” she says, “because it’s like the fingers stroking the skin.”

During her 15-year career in film, Beard absorbed how cinematographers frame their shots. Intuition, as opposed to color theory, began to guide her palette selection.

“I have read the theory, but I try not to be dictated by it,” she says. “I’m after that explosion, so I put colors together that will resonate and cause friction, like the feelings you get from the act of sex itself.”

The artist is also keen to point out that though she references









Clockwise from top left: *What Women Want; Sidesaddle; Temporarily Banishing Isolation; The Big Dipper.*





Right: *Can We Conceive of Humanity If It Did Not Know the Flower?*
Opposite page, from top: *Each Peach Pear Plum; Cyssan.*



source material, her forms are embellished and reimagined. She swaps familiar, voyeuristic cinematic tropes for more intimate ones that compel the viewer to be an involved sexual player. Sometimes ideas come from unlikely places: Recent scientific discoveries concerning the size and shape of the clitoris inspired a group of paintings reminiscent of Henri Matisse's "cut-outs." Her 2017 piece *Beastie Boy*, which features a phallus decorated in what appears to be zebra print, is a work of striking serendipity: "I had been working for years on this painting, but something was missing," she says. "At some point I was listening to the radio and they announced that Adam Yauch from the Beastie Boys had died. I absolutely love them and I was so sad, so I suddenly thought, He's a beastie boy! I'm going to give him a zebra cock! That was my divine inspiration."

She goes on to mention that the years-long process behind *Beastie Boy* is nothing compared w ith the decades-long gestation of a piece she conceived as a teenager living in London. She was moved to acquire approximately 3,000 dildos from a Chinese manufacturer after seeing sex toys in the West End. "I just thought they were so nail-like," she explains. "I wanted to make a bed of nails, but I never got around to doing it. I've had them stored in my loft, knowing I'd make a sculpture from them eventually. And now it is finally happening."

• • •

Helen Beard is an art-world curveball. She is never in danger of over-conceptualizing her work (obfuscation is an anxious badge of honor for many emerging artists), she has no gallery representation, and perhaps most significantly, she has achieved the rare feat of gaining recognition following a break from work to start a family.

Beard still seems slightly stunned by her success. "It's not what women expect, because they always think their career might have to go on the back burner if they have children."

The massive disparities in terms of acknowledgement, critical success and sale prices (women still fetch a fraction of the figures achieved by male artists at auction) mean that Beard's triumph is the exception, not the rule. The reality remains that female artists still face disproportionate challenges if they decide to have children — particularly if they elect, or need, to take time away from their practice. Beard recalls spending



years contemplating how she would re-enter a world so fixated on the next young and trendy creator. “I felt like they might actually be making work that was the same as mine, but the difference was that no one would ever see me,” she says. “It could have easily stayed that way. Women need to be talking about these experiences, but it’s so hard to come back. Too often these voices aren’t being heard.”

It’s very much to the art world’s benefit that Beard, like the big, brilliant bodies in her paintings, isn’t hiding behind anything. ■



JESSICA OYER

Photography by **JESTON BRANDON @PERFECTLYFLAWLESSPHOTO)**
HMUA **@NICHELLEMUA / UNDERCOVER GLAMOUR**
Model **@JESSICA_OYER**









Tell us something surprising about you?
I actually work in the construction industry hanging drywall and other interior remodelling. I will be starting my own construction company soon.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I'm very excited to shoot for Playboy which is such an iconic magazine and to be able to say "I did that!" I'm proud of myself and my body/sexuality as a woman.

What inspires you?
People that are faced with any type of challenges or disabilities and are able to conquer them and feel proud of themselves. I use their examples to push and inspire me in life.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling?
I'm actually what you would call a "tomboy" 80% of the time but love to get "prettied-up" for photo shoots. I love showing my femininity. Putting on makeup. beautiful clothes, working with great photographers and experiencing new locations and hoping to get recognized.

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry?
I love pin-up modeling so I really admire models such as Bettie Paige, Marilyn Monroe and Rita Hayworth to name a few.

What are some of your hobbies?
I play roller derby for 3 teams throughout the year, I also love pole dancing. It makes me feel sexy and is great exercise.

Name three things on your bucket list.
1. Be Playmate Cover Model of the year. 2. Travel to some amazing countries. 3. Run a successful company.

Turn-ons.
1. A confident man with a great smile. 2. Having my car door opened for me. 3. Having my food ordered by my date at a restaurant. 4. When a man compliments me.

Turn-offs.
1. Jealousy 2. People bragging about themselves. 3. People talking bad about others.

Describe to us your perfect date.
The perfect date for me is when my date picks a nice restaurant and orders for the both of us. Then takes me to a comedy club or to listen to music. Followed by some wine and maybe a romantic walk. Then at the end of the evening candlelight snuggles. The rest is Rated R!!

Which world capital would you most like to visit and why?
Rome in Italy. Because of the beautiful monuments, the great historical sights and the wonderful food.

What is your mantra?
Be strong when you are weak. Be brave when you are scared. Be humble when you are victorious. Be a Bad-Ass every day!!









YEAST

DESPERATELY SEARCHING FOR SALVE...AND PERHAPS SALVATION

ILLUSTRATION BY **JOSEPHINE RAIS**



FICTION BY **LISA TADDEO**

Sorry to bother you on a Saturday, Mia said. Her rose gold phone was on the bed and speakerphone was selected. She was offensively high and her voice sounded smeared. She pictured Dr. Ruspin on the other end, mild and gray-bearded, in a spectacular kitchen. Chickpea alfredo.

She waited for him to say, That's all right, but there was only silence.

It's just preternaturally itchy. Like, the itchiest it's ever been.

Is there any discharge?

Nope!

Any pain with urination?

No, it's definitely not a UTI. I just need Diflucan. Fluconazole. Though I've taken the generic before and it hasn't quite worked, so.

I'll send a prescription over, but if it doesn't get better you have to come into the office on Monday.

Okay, but I just want you to know I'm positive it's yeast.

What pharmacy do you use?

CVS. Um. Fuck. Sorry. It might not be open. Can you give me a second while I find a 24-hour place near me?

Dr. Ruspin didn't say anything. Mia grabbed her laptop. She typed in 24-hour CVS near me. The internet was slow. Fuck. She took a hit from her tiny wooden vaporizer. Held it in.

Mia?

Yeah?

Why don't you just text it to me when you have it.

Oh, okay. This is your text? I mean, this is your cell?

Yes, said Dr. Ruspin. He sounded irate and bored. Perhaps a highborn wife was beckoning with sauvignon blanc. Mia wanted him to know she wasn't just another loser. She wanted him to know that she knew about white wine. She loved Riesling and Sancerre. She knew a lot.

Okay!

Okay, thanks. Bye now.

Bye!

• • •

The sativa was hairy and Granny Smith green. It smelled like rain puddles in London in the springtime. And the sweat of a regal man.

I am so high, Mia drawled. She reached her hands between her legs and grated her v with her nails. She'd hoped the pot would dull the itch but if anything it only bejeweled it.

The nearest 24-hour CVS appeared to be in Queens. How was that possible?

Thank God she had a car. Kate's car. It was an aquamarine Chevy Cavalier. The ugliest car in the world.

She texted Dr. Ruspin the phone number of the pharmacy and her DOB.

Six minutes later the phone buzzed.

Done. MY pleasure.

Holy shit, Mia said aloud. Why was MY in all caps? Dr. Ruspin was mostly bald. He was pale and birdlike and she imagined fucking him would be like being a piece of bread on a pier as a seagull shovels its salmon beak across your surface. But he had the power to cure a yeast infection. That was the most any man would have done for her in years. Decades.

She didn't write anything back because she knew being quiet was more powerful. She took a giant hit and held it in for so long she could picture the smoke tinting her lungs a bright jungle green.

Mia thought how weird it was that everyone adored weed. Dads, bankers, chefs, politicians, rich and poor idiots. Loved getting high. But Mia wondered if anyone could even agree on what being high on marijuana was like. Some people inhaled frozen veggie burgers and fruit twists and truffle salt popcorn. Other people got sleepy. Others got talkative. Some people felt horny and sexy. Mia understood those people the least. She felt terrifically unattractive when she was high. She felt like a snail, curling inward and eating itself.

Fuck! The itch. It was the worst she'd ever experienced. In her bathroom she turned the shower on to the hottest setting. She took off just her sweatpants and angled her crotch so that it was under direct assault. The water felt cruel. Teasing. Not hot enough. She'd been fantasizing for hours about finding a homeless man on the street and having him wrap a rough Brillo pad around his penis and then fuck her until pain replaced itch. Pain and fear of whatever he'd given her. She wondered if the homeless even contracted STDs. Where would they find the time? Then she remembered everyone always found the time for sex.

The infection could only have come from one of two places. Venice or Hoboken. Last week she'd stayed in an airless but stunning apartment near the Piazza San Marco, right above the Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella. It was the second best and third worst week of her life. She'd met a man.

One lilac evening at the start of the week Mia had walked into Harry's Bar. She ordered a carafe of red wine. It was brick- colored and ashy. She ordered the carpaccio. She wore a pair of slim navy slacks and a silk camisole. It was July and she was tan all over. Her hatred of the world and everyone in it was at the lowest rung it had been in decades. She sat under a thick window and pretended to read *La Repubblica*. A waiter brought a glass ramekin of olives that were dry but exotic. The water was ice-cold. There were a few businessmen with martinis engaged with their phones. All of them had cuff links. Her carpaccio arrived too quickly, under a grid of Dijon. The door jingled and a 40-something blonde wearing a clear plastic coat walked in, sat at the bar alone and ordered the butterflied veal.

As the first notes of the wine hit her bloodstream Mia felt the problems of the past year evaporate. In Italy everything that worried her seemed subcutaneous. News was not metastatic in Italy. People read the paper. They watched stocks rise and fall like it was the 1980s. Whenever a strange-looking fellow walked into a coffee shop Mia didn't worry he had a gun.

She ate the carpaccio very slowly, savoring every slippery bite. The door jingled again. A man appeared in the doorway. A real one. Late 30s, early 40s. Snout of a wolf, waxed canvas jacket, Mets cap. He was seated at the table directly across from hers. He sat so that he faced her. The blonde at the bar uncrossed and recrossed her legs and took her plastic jacket off. Inside the restaurant the air changed. Mia felt the carnal hiss in her veins. It had been so long.

It happened the way all good things do. Like an architect designed it and Mia had no control.

THERE ARE MEN WHO GIVE YOU YEAST INFECTIONS, SHE THOUGHT, AND MEN WHO DON'T.

The blonde drank two gin martinis and passed out on the floor. The man in the cap — David — was on the ground in an instant. He picked the slumped body up and splashed Mia's glass of water on the blonde's face. She came to immediately. Came alive in David's arms like a fish. Her skin was like crepe. From the front she looked like someone who had consented to terrible things out of desperation. She had a Polish accent but spoke English well. She said she was in town with a man, and the man was called. The way that David handled her, eased her embarrassment, made Mia thrum down between her legs.

After a visit to the bathroom the blonde left, saying the man would meet her at their hotel. Harry's Bar did not charge her for her drinks and the waiter brought her butterflied veal to David and David asked Mia to join him. They shared a few bites before even knowing each other's names.

I don't like veal but this is amazing, Mia said.

On account of their being kept in cages?

No, Mia said.

David smiled.

Is this your first time in Venice? she said.

That's supposed to be my question.

I know, I stole it on purpose because I didn't have any good ones.

No, this isn't my first time in Venice, David said. The tone of his voice was egotistical and present. Mia felt like an animal of prey that wanted to die. That wanted to be hunted by precisely the right predator.

He was a Nike executive. He had hundreds of thousands of frequent-flyer miles. He was staying at the Hotel Flora. They served a children's tea every day and Mia should have known when he mentioned it that there was a reason he did.

Do you like advertising? he asked. They had moved on to bellinis. He ordered a round without asking her if she wanted one. He wore a Patek Philippe that gleamed.

If you mean, do I hate myself, then no. I don't hate myself. But I do want to write screenplays.



When David laughed, Mia felt her whole trunk rise from the seat. She smelled cherries in the air. The bar filled with Beethoven. Then Tom Petty. Mia thought of Kate, for the first time in months, with gratitude and not with rage. This would be the year, she decided, that she would have one linen top. One pair of swinging pants. One beautiful black silk romper. One pair of leather sandals. One vital under-eye cream. And absolutely nothing else.

Do you want to take a walk through the streets of Venice? he asked once she'd taken the last bite of the veal. He canceled his client dinner and her photo shoot didn't start until the following morning. They walked for nearly six hours, stopping for wine and prosciutto and stracchino at several spots along the way. He paid for everything. Every place looked the same, open doorways, sweating waiters. For the rest of her life Mia would associate hanging muscles of provolone with lust, obsession, happiness. They made love in her room. They did not use protection and she would have taken whatever he had to give her.

They saw each other five more times. All of it walking before fucking and walking after. Coffee turning into wine. Drunk walking through the streets. Church bells. The lime stink of trash, the hot sun, the bruise-colored cold of the canal. In Kirikù she bought herself a camouflage slip dress. I have never seen a sexier woman, he whispered in her ear as she handed the saleslady her Amex. She wore the dress outside with her cowboy boots. It was their last day together. He was flying home in the morning. Home was New York for him too. He'd never said he was married, but he also had never taken the ring off. It was gold and the perfect thickness and when they fucked Mia watched it move and glint, thinking there was something outrageously pure in the act of not removing it.

• • •

Higher than she had ever been, Mia drove to Queens. She whooshed down avenues like a criminal. She passed a Thai restaurant and an E-Z DIVORCE and a Tasti D-Lite and a Crocs store and every single thing made her think of David. It was nine o'clock on a Saturday. She couldn't picture him tucking in one of his kids but she could picture him going down on his wife or reading a work of historical fiction.

At the CVS she paid $5 for her pill. Dr. Ruspin had not provided any refills. Her car was parked crudely, many feet from the curb, but instead of going back to it she slipped into a dive bar, the kind that opened in the morning. She ordered a mimosa, which was close to a bellini.

I only have shit champagne, the female bartender said. Is that okay? Verdi.

Sure, Mia said.

Okay. I also have no flutes.

That's fine.

The bartender served the mimosa in a pint glass with a leprechaun on it. Mia slit her fingernail through the foil wrapper and removed the Diflucan. She placed it on her tongue and washed it down with a bright sip of mimosa. The orange juice tasted sweet and freshly squeezed. Forgetting she was in public she scratched herself violently.

There are men who give you yeast infections, she thought, and men who don't. When she got home from Venice four nights ago, she e-mailed David. We're in the same town again, she wrote. He did not write back. He didn't write back the next day or the one after. So last night Mia opened up her Bumble and exchanged seven back-and-forths with a lawyer who was three years younger. His location said NY, NY, but he lived in Hoboken and that was where she met him, at one of the two-story bars on Washington Street. She didn't meet him there because it was easy for him but because she wanted to be away from Manhattan. His name was Brent. He wore a stiff shirt from H&M and the least expensive Apple Watch.

Sometimes Mia forgot that, when she was 15, she'd been raped by her social studies teacher. Statutory rape. The teacher, Mr. Hebrides—Jack—went to jail for 15 years. He'd been released just a few months back. His release made the cover of the *Post*.

Jack looked old as fuck, so skinny. She was neither disgusted nor intrigued. She wondered how he would make money and where he would live but that was about it. She wasn't afraid or anything. It was her parents who had put him away and they were both dead.

But when she was with Brent she felt roundly like the girl who'd fucked her history teacher. She felt like a glazed doughnut. Brent was the kind of guy who read the Post on h is w alk from his Hoboken apartment to his Hoboken law firm where he wore his cheap suit in a room of cheap suits. After Mia had drunk three vodka cranberries to Brent's two martinis and two Heinekens, she said, You know the Creeper Teacher? Who was just released from jail?

Yeah, Brent said. He burped and smiled.

That was me. I was the girl.

Mia didn't know why she did it. The instant it was out of her mouth she felt like something on the bottom of a boat.

Oh, fuck. No way.

Yeah, she said.

He smiled wide. His teeth were Civil War teeth. His gums were light pink. He took her hand in his and she thought he was going to kiss her.

So you're all kinky and shit, he said. He brought her palm to his cheap gray pants and placed it over his dick. It was small and hard like a dollar-store water gun.

Mia felt pure hatred bubbling out of her pores and up out of her scalp. Back in his bleach-smelling apartment he fucked her doggy style, her slim jeans manacling her ankles. She imagined herself as a baby calf, being pounded in a small space, and she thought of David. The night they left her room at three in the morning to share a joint by the canals and they passed a baker making croissants and he gave them a blood-orange croissant. It was warm and fresher than anything she'd had in her life. The taste of blood orange was not so much a taste but a scent. A cloud of an idea. They shared it and kissed and smoked excellent weed he'd brought on the plane with him, because he was a champion.

Brent used a ribbed Durex. His tiny penis felt accusatory inside of her. He said Yeah! with every pump. Each one full of his selfhatred and misogyny. At a certain point he pulled out and began to finger her. It was as though he wanted to hurt her in a different way. She began to cramp and worried he'd pulled her IUD out of alignment.

Now, she realized, it was his finger that had done it. His nails, and whatever lived beneath them.

She wished she could tell Kate. That was all she wanted. To sit in Kate's jewel box on Elizabeth with the bookshelves and the Persian rug and the Riesling on the patio. Their penultimate conversation was the last time Mia would ever be in Kate's apartment. She hadn't known then, that it was going to be the last time. She would have taken pictures or stolen the Rodin crema from the exquisite blue bathroom.

On her phone she went into her contacts and scrolled down to Kate's name and number. Staring at it, she downed her mimosa and smacked the glass back down on the bar like a psychopath. She ordered a kamikaze shot because it was the only one she could always remember. Besides tequila. She felt the shot and the mimosa mix with the marijuana in her brain. She took out her little vial of Xanax. She was down to two and a half pills. She googled Diflucan and Xanax and marijuana and alcohol contraindications.

Before the page loaded she swallowed the half pill. She opened her text exchange with Dr. Ruspin. It was almost midnight.

I'm still itchy, she wrote.

She waited five minutes and sent a question mark.

She waited five minutes more and wrote, Can I also get some alprazolam.

Mia realized the main reason she had fallen in love with David in Venice was because of Kate. Because Kate would have been jealous. A man like David was exactly what Kate had wanted. Not the married part, but Kate would have agreed that a woman in New York over 30 could not be too picky.

She opened up her Talkspace account and typed a feverish emergency note to Susan Premo. Susan was an idiot but there was something homeopathic about writing to her.

Within minutes Susan replied.

That sounds very stressful! And it must be so hard to not be able to tell your best friend.

Yeah, Mia wrote right away, it sucks. She knew she could keep Susan hanging on the other end. The platform wasn't supposed to work like instant messaging but Susan couldn't help herself. She aimed to please. Mia loathed Susan's transparence and availability.

Toward the end Mia had found out that Kate had lied about not getting her calls. She had two "broken" phones in the space of a month. She also occasionally switched her iMessage off and claimed that she'd been in a bad service area. The problem was Kate always pretended to be ignorant of technical stuff. So for many months Mia believed her.

Are you all set? the bartender asked. She had a pierced brow and stunning green eyes.

Mia was wasted. But why, she wondered, did the bartender want her to go? If she were a man the bartender would ask her if she wanted another round. If she were a man, she would have left her change on the bar top, the way that men did.

Yes, I'm all set.

Mia paid and got back in her car. Kate's car. They had driven to so many places in it. They had seen everything there was to see along the Hudson. Across the dashboard and on the gear shift console and along the bottoms of the windows were the bumper stickers of all the places they had visited in the car. It had been Mia's idea to put the stickers on the inside because they were reminders for them, the two girls, not for people on the outside of their car. It was always Mia who had the sentimental ideas.

On the horn was a bratwurst and spaetzle sticker from Mountain Brauhaus in Gardiner, New York, where they'd drunk beers from steins and eaten wienerschnitzel with fried eggs on top. That day had seemed to go on forever. Briefly they'd entertained quitting their jobs and becoming waitresses at the Mountain Brauhaus.

We could rent an entire house, Mia had said. And get a dog.

A husky, Kate said. She drank less than Mia did. She almost always drove.

After lunch that day they went to a sugar shack and talked to the men who ran it. Two burly brothers whose names were actually Nick and Dick.

Which do you want? Kate whispered. She was always doing things like that. Making Mia feel like everything was up to her. It was a lie. Kate would have flirted with whatever brother she wanted behind Mia's back. Kate had been into men too much. Anyway Nick and Dick's wives came out from the main house. They both had straw-colored hair and hippie clothes. Kate and Mia drove giggling to Hudson. They drank more and ate a

seven-course dinner. They took turns taking a bath at the bed-and-breakfast they couldn't afford.

Now Mia drove back toward Manhattan. She could barely see. Between her legs the itch had purpled into something cruel. In the past her yeast infections had simmered down within 20 minutes of taking the medicine.

Her phone vibed. It was a text from the guy, Brent. She thought he hated her. She'd left the very second after he came. She wondered why she'd waited until he came. Why was it not over until the man came? Even if you hated him? She wanted to ask Kate.

The text from Brent said, Wut u into?

Holding the steering wheel with her left hand she opened Talkspace with her right and wrote to Susan Premo.

Do you think there are men who give yeast infections and men who don't?

Susan didn't reply right away so Mia wrote, What do I do? I'm driving in a car under the influence. I don't like myself.

While she waited, she texted Dr. Ruspin.

It's so itchy I want to kill myself.

Outside her window the moon was viscous and orange. She was grateful she was this fucked-up. She thought how nuts it was that the woman she'd been last week with David was nothing like the mongrel she was right now. In this teal Chevy Cavalier, driving fast and high with the windows open, mascara smudge under her eyes. Absolutely no music on the radio.

OUTSIDE HER WINDOW THE MOON WAS VISCOUS AND ORANGE. SHE WAS GRATEFUL SHE WAS THIS FUCKED-UP.

A few weeks before Kate was gone, they had a terrific fight. It ended with a brawl outside a bar. Mia threw Kate on the ground and kicked her in the neck. She didn't know why the neck. Looking down at her friend on the ground, Mia felt like she was looking at herself. She didn't want to hurt the face. Kate was not beautiful but she was pretty. She'd told Kate the truth about Mr. Hebrides. That she'd fucked him willingly and then told her parents she'd been groomed and coerced. Now Kate lay there on the curb, her red hair spilling like trash, and said, You weird pathetic slut. You ruined a man's life because you're a weird pathetic slut.

You'll never be beautiful, Mia said.

Then Kate said something else, but Mia had to block it out. It was too hard. She thought, That's it, I hope she dies there tonight. Mia walked away.

She got as far as Christopher and doubled back, running in her heels. Then she took the heels off and ran some more. But Kate was gone.

In the morning Mia brought flowers and doughnuts. She knocked and knocked on the blue door of the most beautiful floor-through on the Lower East Side. The problem, she realized now, was that she thought there was something to fix. She thought they were deeper than they were. Mia truly believed in her heart they could quit their jobs and become waitresses at Mountain Brauhaus. And rent a split level with yellow grass and get a rescue dog in an indeterminate flavor of gray. For Mia, doing so would have plugged the holes in her heart left by all the things that shoot up holes in the heart. Kate didn't have a heart. That was apparent now.

Mia passed the Robin Ridge Apartments then. She gagged. It was the ugliest apartment complex the girls had ever seen.

Kate had said, If we don't find dudes soon, we might as well move in there. Get instant udon from that bodega and drink wine called Vanessa every Saturday night.

Ewww! Mia had said. But inside she felt warm.

She looked at her phone again. Why the fuck wasn't Susan Premo writing her back! She was paying $196 a month for someone to fucking act like they cared on the phone.

She texted Brent back. She wrote, I have syphilis.

Then she opened up her e-mail and typed David's beautiful full name in.

You won't get away with what you did to me.

The problem, she realized — what Kate would have said right away — the problem was thinking there were some men who didn't give yeast infections. They all gave them. Some were just more insidious than others. The quieter ones were worse. They itched the soul.

Men were all terrible. Kate should have known. She must have known. But if Kate knew that, then why did Kate move to Palmetto Bluff with a man? A man that Mia had never met. A man Kate had said was just some guy from Tinder. A man she saw every other day for months while lying to Mia, telling her she was working or sick or depressed. The whole time Kate had been eating at new restaurants and falling in love.

And Susan Premo and everyone in the world that Mia met from here on out, she would tell the same thing. That Kate had died. Because that's what happened. The Kate that Mia thought Kate was had died.

In her e-mail to David, she deleted *to me*. Just as she was thinking how people always say don't text and drive, how come no one ever says don't e-mail and drive, just as she was thinking that, she hit something. Like a bowling pin but taller and more formidable. She was beyond high and drunk and so she laughed, because it didn't seem like a big deal. Nothing was. It was just life.

She looked in her rearview mirror and saw that it was a man. A resident, perhaps, of the Robin Ridge Apartments. She didn't want to keep driving, but she did. Then she hit SEND and felt truly free, like a seagull or someone who had already died. ■



MEGAN MARIA

@MEGANMARIA__



Photography by **MIKE COHEN @MIKECOHENPHOTOS**
PR **LEO ALDERMAN @LSAPUBLICATIONS**







Were you excited to shoot for playboy?
Yes super excited I've always wanted to shoot for playboy and the photographers work always looks incredible so I can't wait to see the spread in the magazine.

Guilty pleasure?
Chocolate I literally can't go a day without it

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modelling?
I guess I was really drawn in by the glamour side of it, when I was growing up I used to see all the girls in the mags and loved that whole look. At the time I didn't think it was something I could ever do I grew up in a small town and it just wasn't a job that people round there did. Later on, I got contacted via twitter to shoot I was really nervous at the time but I just thought why not give it a try I had nothing to lose, so I moved away threw myself into it and I was then approached by a tv channel in the UK to be a presenter and now I'm here in playboy so I guess we can say it all worked out.

Who do you look up to in the modelling industry?
I can't say I have anyone specific in mind that I look up to, however I have met some amazing people from modelling some of which are now good friends of mine.

What are some of your hobbies?
I'm really into my fitness so I go to the gym 6 days a week and also take Pilates and Yoga classes, it's important for me not only to stay fit physically but I also find it helps mentally to clear my head and keep me motivated.

Name something on your bucket list?
Travel more loadssss more

Turn-ons.
Humour someone that can make me laugh and doesn't take themselves too seriously, confidence and being a gentleman.

Turn-offs.
Arrogance and laziness - I'm always trying to better myself so someone that isn't driven is a real turn off for me.

Describe to us your perfect date.
It's really dependant on the person, but as a general rule if it involves food and lots of it then I'll probably be happy :)

Which country would you most like to visit, and why?
Fiji It just looks so beautiful and idyllic.







Rebekka Armstrong

OUR SEPTEMBER 1986 PLAYMATE
REFLECTS ON LOVING
LIFE AND LIVING WITH AIDS



IF YOU HAD TOLD ME WHEN I WAS YOUNGER that I would one day say out loud that I have HIV, and that I would be okay and it would feel *good* to stop hiding it, I wouldn't have believed you. But when I did speak up, a huge weight was lifted. It was the best thing I ever could have done for myself.

I was 22 and already a Playmate when I was diagnosed with HIV. When the clinic called to tell me, I remember crumpling to the floor. The energy just left my body; I was in complete shock. At the time, it was a death sentence. The doctors said I might have a year or two. For a while I was diligent about trying to be as healthy as possible, taking my medications. But the medicine itself had awful side effects. I developed severe anemia, neuropathy and pancreatitis. You start thinking, If I'm going to die soon, is this really how I want to live, not *doing* anything? To hell with it. I just want to have a good time — eat chili cheese fries, drink beer, snort crystal meth, smoke pot. Those were my coping mechanisms.

Eventually I hit bottom and tried to take my own life. I landed in the hospital for days, and during that time I got sober and started to talk about my feelings. I'd been hiding the truth from almost everyone for about five years. It was when I was in the hospital that I decided I wanted to go public about my diagnosis. Before that, I wanted to tell Playboy about my HIV status and everything else. I went in and just opened up: "I've been terrified to tell you about what's really going on with me," I said.

Then I did *Hard Copy*. I had no idea what to expect. They could've portrayed me negatively, but they didn't. Years later, after I was diagnosed with AIDS, Playboy helped me do *E! True Hollywood Story*, and Hef did an interview for the show. He didn't have to do that; he was so cool. It was empowering to know that he and Playboy had my back and supported me. I wasn't doing this alone.

One night, I ran into Christie Hefner at the Mansion. I was hoping she would give me a chance to talk to Playmates or Playboy employees about AIDS, because I had started lecturing and teaching about it locally. Christie took it further: She gave me a platform. Playboy funded an initiative often called the Sex on Campus tour, and for years I traveled the country, talking to students, lecturing and raising awareness. Having a platform to talk about HIV gave me a purpose. It gave me a voice.

Students would fill the room, thinking I was there to talk about sex. They didn't know it was going to be about HIV. When I dropped the bomb on them, the reaction was always fear: "That could've been me." I would stay for hours afterward. I wanted to talk to as many young people as possible about the realities of this disease and how easy it is *not* to contract it. I lived to educate people about HIV and AIDS. It was a career.

I still do outreach. I speak at many venues, lecture at schools and participate in focus groups. You might even see photos of me on billboards and at bus stops around the country in ads to support HIV awareness. I'm an activist. There's a part of me that *needs* to help others. Being a Playmate had its perks — we were on the guest list at all the L.A. clubs, parties and restaurants, and I was in rock videos like Great White's "Once Bitten Twice Shy." But more important, people listened to me because I was a Playmate; it was like I was flying in on Playboy's magic carpet. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

When your body starts wasting from AIDS, weight just melts off. It eats muscle mass; it's catabolic. I needed to keep myself strong and fit, so for about 10 years I was really into body-building. The last competition I did was in 2009, and then I took what I had learned about fitness and turned that into a new career. Today I'm a personal trainer, a certified corrective exercise specialist and a sports therapy aide. I wear many hats. I love gardening in my yard; I'm a hot-pepper freak. Last year I grew cannabis. I don't indulge — I have no desire now to drink or use drugs — but I turned it into cannacoconut oil and developed my own CBD balm, Buddha Trees. I got really into it.

It's cliché, but today I love life. When I was diagnosed, I thought my life was over. I didn't see a future for myself. Just making plans for that year felt really brave. But here I am, 30 years later. In about 30 more I'll be 80 and in my rocking chair. Not all days are perfect by any means, but I'm so much more than happy. I am inspired on a daily basis. I'm going to be a grandmother this summer! My future is filled with love.

Preceding pages: *"We spent about three days out in the desert for my Playmate photo shoot. It was during the bloom in Palmdale."* ***Near right:*** *"I think we shot this in a rustic-looking old cabin near an abandoned gold mine."* ***Far right, top and middle:*** *Outtakes from Armstrong's Playmate pictorial. "Subscribers used to be able to get recorded wake-up calls from Playmates. I'd say something like 'Okay, I'm giving you butterfly kisses all down your belly, and it's time to get up.' "* ***Bottom:*** *"This was taken outside the general store in a tiny town called Randsburg, not far from where I grew up."*

















Opposite page: *"I grew up in the Mojave Desert. There wasn't a whole lot to do, but I knew I wanted to be in* PLAYBOY. *The day I turned 18, I asked a family friend to help me submit my photos, and I got called in for a test shoot. This photo is from that shoot — the shoes and panties are mine, but they put those socks on me."* ***Right:*** *"When Marilyn Grabowski,* PLAYBOY*'s photo editor, told me they were going to make me a Playmate, I couldn't believe it. I didn't tell anyone except my high school sweetheart, and I swore him to secrecy because I thought I was going to jinx it."* ***Bottom left:*** *"This is another shot from my Playmate test."* ***Bottom right:*** *Another outtake from Armstrong's pictorial photo shoot.*



CLASSIC CARTOONS



"It looks like Isosceles is experimenting with triangles again."



"I'm really upset that the people don't believe me anymore. Perhaps I should use a different facial expression when I lie to them."





"Great Scott, Holmes—you are a master of disguise!"

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